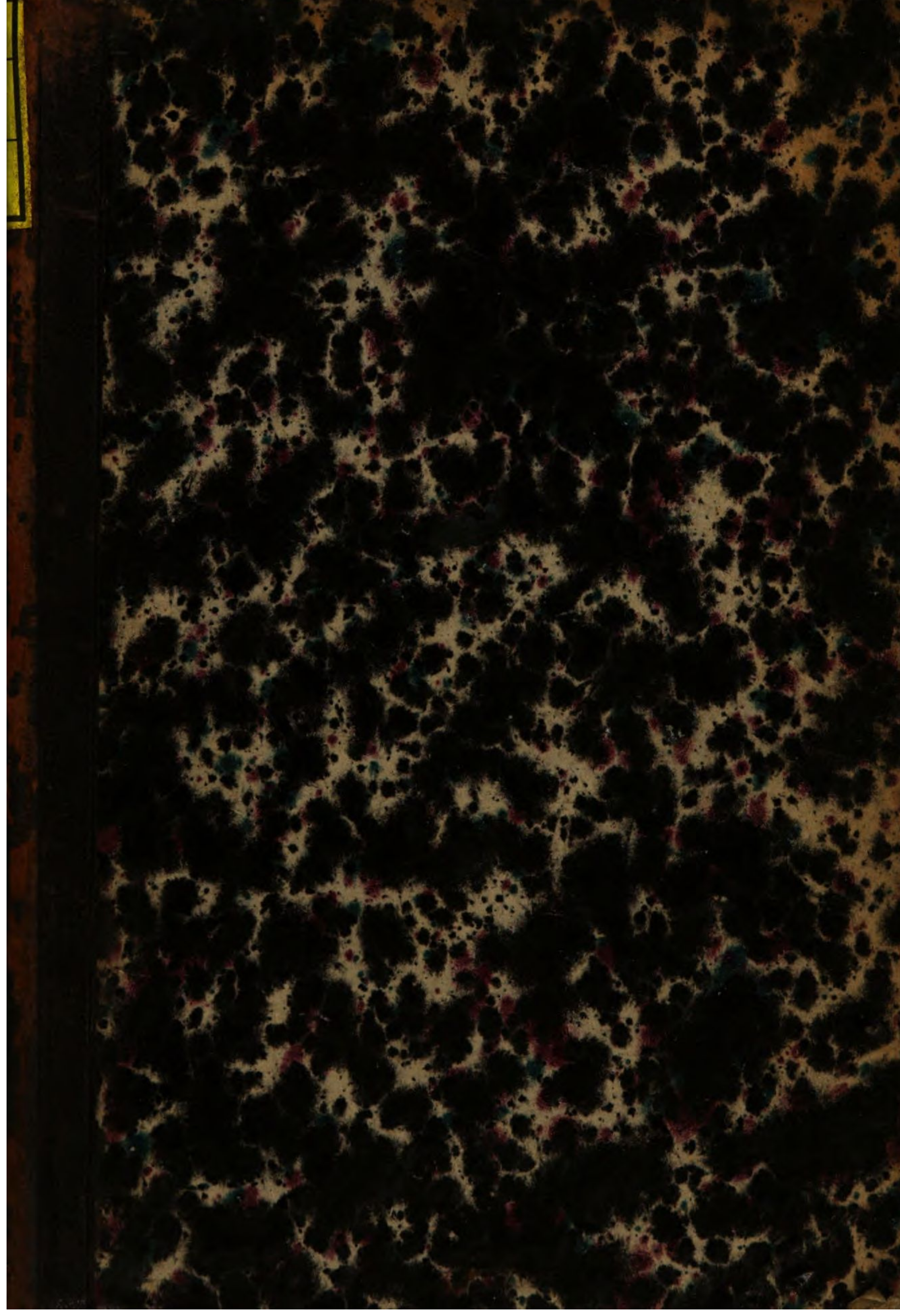




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HER MOTHER'S DARLING.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

"GEORGE GEITH," "TOO MUCH ALONE," "HOME, SWEET HOME,"
"THE EARL'S PROMISE," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

HAMBURG
KARL GRÄDENER.

1878.

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HER MOTHER'S DARLING.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. LESSANT'S GENERALSHIP.

IT was, perhaps, not quite without reason that Miss Carder, usually a lady of a mild and equable temper, hated Mrs. Lessant with an hatred foreign to her nature.

Had Mrs. Lessant done her some great wrong, inflicted upon her some frightful injury, Miss Carder could, not merely as a Christian but as a woman, have freely forgiven her. Nay, doubtless, owing to a peculiarity in her temperament, she would have enjoyed forgiving her.

But Mrs. Lessant never adopted the *rôle* either of a desperate criminal or a repentant sinner. She was always smooth, false, apparently right. In her heart she detested Miss Carder because,

by virtue of inheritance, that lady possessed pictures she could never, even as Mr. Lessant's wife, hope to own; and jewellery which, to quote her own phrase, "made her feel wicked." Nevertheless, it had always been necessary for the elderly woman and the middle-aged to appear civil to each other, for which reason the visits to Elm Vale and to Jersey House were always conducted upon principles of the strictest propriety.

When those great though hostile powers met, then did much ceremony prevail. The courtesy the ladies showed to each other became well-nigh oppressive. They preserved the strictest etiquette, and were as civil to each other as the principals and seconds in a duel; for which reason, perhaps, their visits were few and far between; and when Miss Carder chanced to call during Mrs. Lessant's absence from home, the banker's wife breathed an audible "Thank Heaven," while the lady of Elm Vale breathed a sigh of gratitude, and thought, "What an infliction I have escaped!"

The first time Miss Carder saw Honoria was at a little dance, given by the wife of the gentleman who had bought Littlesham, the place which once belonged to the girl's grandfather; and then she said to Mrs. Lessant, who happened to be close at hand,

"Who is that bright, happy-looking young creature?"

"What bright, happy-looking young creature?" asked Mrs. Lessant, surveying the dancers through her eye-glass.

"My brother's partner; see, they have ceased waltzing and are going into the hall."

"That—oh! that is Honoria Legerton, my cousin. Yes, she does look happy, poor thing; is it not a pity she is so plain?"

"I do not consider her plain," was the answer. "She is unformed, and perhaps is not critically handsome; but no one with such an expression of countenance could be called plain!"

Five minutes after, Clara pressed up to Honoria:

"Your hair is coming down, dear; let me

fasten it up" — then added in a whisper, while her hands busied themselves with braids Mason's skill had secured past the power of dancing to disarrange, "Don't dance again with Arthur. Mamma is looking as black as night. I give you leave to have Tom for partner as often as you like"; and then Clara, a mass of blue and white, with bunches of forget-me-nots dotting her dress, and the same flowers nestling in her hair, flitted away with a gentleman who thought that, "by Gad," there was something remarkably nice and winning in seeing a couple of girls who were so fond of each other.

As for Mr. Carder, the instant Clara turned her fair shoulders, he looked straight at Honoria with an expression of such amusement that, though her cheeks were redder with blushes than they had ever been with sunburn, she could not help laughing outright.

"It was impossible for me to avoid hearing that kindly caution; Clara delivered it like a stage aside. Now I wonder of what sin I have been guilty, that Mrs. Lessant considers I am

not worthy to dance with her—niece—cousin—what is the relationship?”

“I do not know,” answered Honoria. “Theresa says there is none, that the thread came to an end long ago. My grandfather and Mrs. Lessant’s father were second cousins; that, I think, is the relationship or non-relationship.”

“If it were my case, I should think you a very near relative,” said Mr. Carder gravely; “but then I have so few cousins. Shall we have another turn, just one, before ‘Tom’ appears to appropriate you?”

“I should like it, but I dare not,” answered Honie.

“Why not?”

“Because Mrs. Lessant would be displeased. Of course, she knows best what I ought to do, and I am always doing something she thinks wrong.”

“Then risk one more wrong and take another turn. You love waltzing.”

“Yes, but I hate being scolded afterwards.”

“Do they scold you at Jersey House?”

"You must take the expression as a *façon de parler*," said Miss Honie, her cheeks all aflame. "Oh! here is Mr. Fleming."

"Is not Clara good!" whispered that young man, nervously clasping as much of Honoria's white glove as his state of mind permitted him to understand was in existence. "She has told me to dance every possible dance with you for the remainder of the night."

"I would rather sit down, thank you," answered Honoria, with that little *hauteur* which belongs to sensitive natures and which is sometimes a little misunderstood.

"But, then, you will upset all her plans!"

"If she had any plans she was not good to me," was the reply. "That, however," she added hastily, "is of no consequence; I will dance with you now, Mr. Fleming, if you wish."

Thus my little lady began to graduate in the world's university. She was an apter pupil than her mother could ever have been, and the world approved of her accordingly.

Mrs. Legerton never had been very clever in

that sort of knowledge, and her daughter's letters astonished her accordingly. Here was Honie, whom in her heart of hearts she had always and rightly considered deficient in some of those stately forms of breeding, accounted in certain circles as of paramount importance—well, here was that slim, unformed girl writing about men and women, criticizing manners, speaking of dress, trying to rate things at their proper value, as if she had been fifty years of age.

“My child will never come back to me any more,” thought the gentle lady; and she was right. Her Honie, the girl who in the early summer's sunset walked beside Mr. Warren to Frodsham, could return to the cottage never again. Ah! never.

But still, almost to the last part of her visit, Honie remained sufficient of a child to have not the remotest idea why her stay at Jersey House had seemed so pleasant; why, spite of Mrs. Lessant's hints about etiquette, Miss Lessant's suggestions as to what she ought to do and

what she should leave undone, the sneers of Miss Beatrice at her "rustic innocence" and her "delicious ignorance," and Clara's fits of ill-temper and occasionally despotic rule, she felt happier and gayer than she had ever done in her life before; so happy, indeed, that mere existence seemed a greater pleasure than it had ever done in the days when she wore pinafores, and sat in the noontide under the great mulberry tree at Antlet, dyeing her face and hands a good reddish purple with the fruit that littered the ground.

"You seem to be in very high spirits to-day, Honie," on one occasion remarked Mrs. Lessant, after the manner of a person seeking for information. In fact, she had not made up her mind whether high spirits was a condition to be condemned or approved; and for this reason, there was no reproach in her tone, a matter of somewhat rare occurrence when she was addressing her relative.

"I am afraid I worry you sometimes with dancing and running about the house; but I

cannot help it. I feel so light-hearted and happy. At home I used sometimes to be dull for a few hours, but here, except for five minutes at a time, I never seem to fret about anything. I wonder how it is; and away from mamma too!" added Honoria, with a certain self-reproach.

"Well, you see, my dear, there are many causes, all of which, no doubt, conspire to make you cheerful. In the first place, your mamma has had many trials, and they must have produced a considerable effect upon her. Even when she was quite young, no one ever accused her of being very lively; indeed—" proceeded Mrs. Lessant hastily, noticing a storm-cloud gathering on Honoria's forehead, "none of the Jerseys were particularly vivacious. A certain serenity of disposition, as far removed from gloom as from mirth, was a characteristic of all the members of our family."

Mrs. Lessant paused, but Honoria made no remark. By this time she had learned that, whenever her hostess began to speak of the merits of the Jerseys, she was quite certain to end by

disparaging some one else, and accordingly prepared herself for rebuke.

It was lightly administered, however. If it were a sin to be unlike the Jerseys, it was a proper virtue to be happy while a guest at Jersey House; and Mrs. Lessant, having by this time quite satisfied herself high spirits ought not to be entirely commended, remarked there was a certain danger attending all moods save the equable.

"Girls who are so gay as you, Honie, are often subject to fits of depression. As you have just admitted, in your own home you often feel dull, and I am sure I do not wonder at it. My only marvel is that the monotony of your life has not killed all vivacity. Here of course you see people—nice people; you have no anxiety of any sort; you are made much of; you have better food, and, as a natural consequence, a better appetite; you hear intellectual conversation—"Do I?" thought Honoria); you have pleasant companions—"Have I?"—of about your own age—"Are they?"—Mr. Lessant treats you just as if you were his own daughter."

"Yes, indeed he does," said Honoria, hastily.

"And I am sure you ought to feel flattered by the attention Miss Carder has paid you."

"I do feel flattered," agreed the girl.

"Though, of course, you understand that it is solely for Trixy's sake she has shown you so much kindness, still it must be gratifying for you to feel you are related to a family able to command such consideration for you. Since you came to us, I have, as I told your dear mother when writing to her only this morning, insisted upon your being included in every invitation sent to my own girls—in fact, for one of them I should not have taken the trouble I have for you—with the single exception of going to dear Lady Flora's wedding, and I could not compass an invitation for that. You see Mr. Lessant could not get one even for his own nephew."

"I shall feel quite unhappy, if you say any more about that," interrupted Honoria. "Even if I had been invited, I could not have gone. I have no dress fit to wear at such a grand

house; and, besides, I could not and would not put you to the expense of taking me with you. I shall be as happy as possible alone here—I shall indeed."

"You will not be quite alone," remarked Mrs. Lessant with a gracious smile. "You will have Tom, and you must try to make him happy too."

"I had forgotten him," and then as she added, "I will amuse him as well as I can while you are away," something in Mrs. Lessant's face made her blush to her temples.

"You are a dear little girl," said Mrs. Lessant, patting her burning cheeks with a certain elephantine playfulness, and then she turned away affecting not to see that Honie's eyes were full of tears which had their source in the hatred she felt at the part Clara's duplicity and her own weakness had assigned her.

"I won't have it any longer," she said to that young lady the same evening. "I cannot bear being so deceitful. I wonder you and Tom can endure to be so double-faced."

"Hoity-toity!" cried Clara, "here is a nice little storm in a teapot. Miss Honoria Legerton, the distinguished actress, makes her appearance in 'Much Ado About Nothing.' We will all take tickets for your benefit. Don't look cross."

"You ought not to be false, then. You know as well as I do that your mamma thinks Tom is fond of me."

"And is it vexed that Tom is not fond of it; never mind. If it only looks sweet and pretty, it shall have a Tom of its own some day."

"Shall I?"

"Not if you look such daggers at poor me. Come, Honie, be reasonable. You were asked here as we all know in order that papa's nephew might fall in love with you, and it is therefore you and not I who have been deceitful. Under perfectly false pretences you have had what the Americans call a very good time; you have enjoyed yourself; you have been made much of by Mr. and Miss Carder, and Tom and papa; you have not been lectured half so constantly as I am by Trix and Tessy; for her, mamma has

been amiability itself; and yet you know you have not done the very thing you were invited to Jersey House in order that you might accomplish. Give me the chances you have had, and no other girl's lover should have been constant to her. It is not too late even now. You will have Tom to yourself for ten whole days, and if you fail to carry out the wishes of my respected parent in the course of that time—why, never talk to me about deceiving mamma again.”

“But, Clara, you surely are not going to stay away for nearly a fortnight?” said Honoria, her attention quite diverted from the original question.

“Yes, we are,” answered Clara. “Three days I am aware was the time mentioned, but you will not see us back so soon, and you may make your arrangements accordingly. I only wish I was in your shoes. I wish mamma would let me remain here instead of dragging me off to that hateful Wimpledon. I shall be mewed up at the hotel with her and Tessy and Trix, and get as cross as they are. What fun we might have at home here, with the house to ourselves,

and nobody to interfere with us! Papa, of course, will be back almost immediately; and you must take great care of him, for he is very fond of you—crosspatch. If I were you I should take advantage of our absence, and play and sing all day long. I shall tell Tom to make you.”

Such an array of finery as was packed up by Mason, assisted by the young ladies' maid, to do honour to Lady Flora's wedding!

It was as a mere matter of courtesy to Mr. Lessant that his wife and daughters had been asked to Gracelands Court at all. They were invited to be present at the marriage, at the breakfast, and the ball in the evening; but they had not been entreated to stay at the Court, for which reason rooms had long before been engaged for Mr. Lessant and party at the Royal Stag, Wimpledon,—a rather fashionable watering-place, to which Mrs. Lessant often resorted when unable to obtain a change of air further afield.

In Honoria's eyes, accustomed though they had been for some time past to the sight of extravagance in dress, the amount of clothing

required for that visit seemed incredible. Dresses, bonnets, jackets, shawls, laces, boots, shoes, gloves, fans, feathers, and all kinds of feminine frippery, filled the dressing-room to overflowing. There were the handkerchiefs Honoria's own hands had embroidered. There on Mrs. Lessant's bed was spread out the velvet dress trimmed with old point, wherein she proposed to array herself before proceeding to the ball. From one room to another Honoria passed in a state of bewildered astonishment.

"How rich they must be!" thought the girl, "and yet Mrs. Lessant was mean enough to try to get me to wear Trixy's old silk."

As for Mr. Lessant, he did not take quite so philosophic a view of his females' apparel.

"Good heavens! Mrs. L.," he said, having caught a glimpse of some small portion of Clara's finery, "what will this visit cost us? No amount of business the earl can put in my way would repay such an outlay. I should not mind making a wager that the bill for Lady Flora's trousseau won't be a bit longer than that I shall

have to settle for the honour and glory of hearing her say, 'I will.'"

"Perhaps you would have liked me and the girls to go in print dresses?" observed Mrs. Lessant with withering sarcasm.

"I certainly should have liked to see you go in anything promising to be less expensive."

"Then, perhaps, for the future, you will be so good as to state your wishes in writing. You know you have but to tell me what you desire I should do, to secure perfect obedience."

"To secure what?" inquired Mr. Lessant.

"I speak perfectly distinctly," replied the lady, "so that there can be no necessity for me to repeat my words. If you are so poor as to be unable to afford suitable clothing for your daughters, the sooner I understand our actual position the better. It might be well for us, perhaps, to lay down our carriages, and get rid of the servants. Possibly, you might even think it well for us to live over the bank. If economy is to be the rule of the day, we may as well practise it to the fullest extent; but," went on Mrs.

Lessant slowly and impressively, "so long as we occupy or pretend to occupy a good position in society, I shall expect to have things necessary to maintain that position, and not to be called to account for every sixpence I spend, as if I were your housekeeper, or one of the lowest of your clerks."

For answer, Mr. Lessant walked out of the room, his face very red, his hands plunged in his pockets, his eyes brighter than usual, his eyebrows puckered into a frown, and his step slow and heavy.

In the hall he met Mr. Carder.

"The train," said that gentleman, "Mrs. Lessant wishes to travel by to-morrow leaves, I find, at three forty-five, instead of three fifty-five; and I thought I would call round and say this, as there is nothing else for Wimpledon until seven."

Mr. Lessant heard him to the end, and then remarked quite dispassionately,

"I wish Wimpledon, and Lady Flora, and the earl, were all at the devil."

"So far as I am concerned," said Mr. Carder, "I have no desire to quarrel with the sentiment."

Fortified, perhaps, by which expression of congenial opinion, Mr. Lessant went out of the house apparently comforted.

When the next afternoon arrived he had recovered his serenity, and met his wife and daughters at the railway station, where also Mr. Carder appeared to see them off.

"What, not coming with us!" exclaimed Mrs. Lessant, whose temper had already been somewhat tried by what she called Clara's forwardness in kissing her hand to Mr. Fleming, and exhorting Honoria not to flirt with him. "Now, I do call that too bad. I should not feel in the least surprised if you never appeared at the wedding at all."

"You are mistaken," said Mr. Carder quietly. "Unless I am too ill to travel, or that some accident happens to the train, or that there is a run on the bank, you will see me to-morrow evening at the Royal Stag. But I cannot leave this afternoon. It would not be quite convenient

for Mr. Lessant and myself to be absent for two whole days."

"You see, my dear, we want another working partner," remarked Mr. Lessant in kindly explanation.

"Why do you not get one then?" inquired the lady.

"We are thinking of doing so," said Mr. Carder.

"Shall you be at the manor to-night?" asked Miss Lessant, meaning Jersey House, which was often called the manor by Mrs. Lessant and her daughters.

"Not unless there is anything you wish me to do for you," he answered.

"No, thank you; I think we have not forgotten a single article."

"What wonderful memories you must have!" he remarked; and then the train came up, and the ladies rustled into a compartment; Mr. Lessant bustled in after them. The two maids and a footman made themselves as comfortable as was consistent with dignity on the bare seats of a second-class carriage. The guard opened

most of the doors in order to shut them again with a great bang, the whistle sounded, Mr. Carder raised his hat, Clara waved her hand and went through some pantomime of leave taking, which drew down upon her animadversions from both her sisters, and they were gone.

Mr. Carder, standing on the platform, looked for a moment along the straight curveless line of rails that led away from Dilfield, and then with a sigh of relief turned slowly out of the station, and walked slowly back to the town.

A couple of hours later dinner was as solemnly served for Honoria and Mr. Fleming, as if there had been twenty to partake of it.

"I suppose," said the young man, after Horman had announced in sonorous tones the fact of the meal being ready; "I suppose I must take you in to-day."

"You need not unless you like," she answered. "I can walk in alone if necessary," whereupon they both laughed like a couple of foolish children, and continued laughing during dinner at, to Horman's grave mind, such silly nothings, that he

said downstairs he did not believe Mrs. Lessant would approve of "such goings on."

"Then she ought to have taken Miss Honoria with her," said a pert housemaid, tossing her head with what she considered "quite an air of society." "I am sure there are not many young ladies who could laugh after being left out all in the cold as a person may say. Yes, you may look," she continued, generally addressing the other servants, "but this is a free country, though this may not be a very free house, and I shall say just what I think, which is, that I thought it downright disgraceful to see our young ladies and their ma flaunting off every one of them, and leaving that poor dear all alone."

"But she ain't alone," suggested Mr. Horman in a voice full of hidden meaning.

"Phif!" said the housemaid, who knew something of Clara's morning rambles. "She is alone as far as the change to Wimpledon and the company and the fine sight of the wedding is concerned. And she on a visit here, too; and

master as anxious as ever was to have her with them."

"Lor!" said the cook.

"It is a fact; with my own ears I heard master say to missus, 'Why can't the child come with us? If I make no complaint about the expense, I am sure you need not.'"

"That was one for her," commented the cook approvingly.

"Yes, and then," went on the housemaid, "missus says, you know her scientific Lucy way, with her nose lifted up into the air and her chin trying to follow it,

"'My dear Robert,' and he is her dear too if any body chooses to believe it," (a challenge no one hastened to take up) —

"'My dear Robert, it is really useless discussing this matter again. I cannot make you understand the position, and therefore I shall not try to do so. Honoria cannot go with us to Wimpledon, and we need not pursue the subject further.'"

"Ay, that is her exact," remarked Mr. Hor-

man, not without a certain jealous admiration of the young lady's power of mimicry. "She do speak to him sometimes as if he was dirt; puts her foot on him, so to speak."

"More fool he to let her then," commented the cook, who had, report stated, tried the same *rôle* herself in matrimony and failed disastrously.

"I will say for master though that he answered her quite brave, though gentle as is his way with missus. 'I don't fancy her mother would quite like it'; those were his very words. You may think I am speaking the truth or not, just as you please, but if I was never to open my lips again I could take an oath he said no less nor no more.

"And then," continued the narrator after a short and artistic pause which served to whet the appetite of her hearers to the keenest point of relish, "missus spoke up quite sharp and she says, says she,

"Then her mother must dislike it then.'"

"Well, I never!" said Mr. Horman.

"Lor! nor I," echoed the cook.

"Ay; I am sure after that it is enough to make a person's blood run cold to hear her found fault with, the poor dear, for keeping up her heart a bit. No offence to you, Mr. Horman, all the same. Laugh! it is well she can laugh; there are some people who would not bear it so quietly, and I do not care who hears me say so," which remark was delivered with such *gusto*, that Mr. Horman, who began to feel the conversation might take a still more personal turn, suddenly recollected it was time to take up tea, adding with conciliatory jocosity,

"*We* must not forget them, must we?"

"One might say they had been left like the babes in the wood, poor dears," observed the cook.

"There ain't much of a babe about Mr. Fleming," answered the housemaid, "and that missus will find out one of these days or I'm greatly mistaken," whereupon Mr. Horman, remarking that babes or no babes they would want some tea, hurried upstairs with his tray.

Already the young people were beginning to find time hanging on their hands. Like children starting for a long holiday, they had taken so much out of themselves at first that almost before the journey had begun they were tired and weary, and they welcomed the advent of tea with enthusiasm.

When that was finished, however, there still remained two hours to be got through before eleven, which at Jersey House was considered an orthodox time for retiring to rest, but a little diversion was caused at a quarter to ten by going down to the dining-room, where Tom in a good father-of-the-family sort of tone read prayers, and Honoria, kneeling in a corner apart from every one, tried to think of all the sad things she could remember—shipwrecks, dying people, Antlet, and so forth, in order to maintain a decent gravity.

After that the servants went to bed and the house was quite quiet, deadly quiet, as Honoria remarked.

“Now is the time for you to sing something

for me, Honoria," he suggested. "Clara told me to ask you."

"Shouldn't, couldn't, wouldn't," said the girl. "Mrs. Lessant does not want me to sing, and I shall not sing while I am here."

"But no one need ever know anything about it," he persisted. "The servants are in bed, the ubiquitous Mason is at Wimpledon. If you like I will go downstairs to make sure that not even Horman can possibly hear you."

"It strikes me, Mr. Thomas Fleming," said Honoria, looking up from her work and addressing her companion with the delightful censoriousness of youth, "that you are not one half so particular about being straightforward as I think people should be."

"I am sure you do not mean that, my dear Mentor," observed the young fellow, laughing.

"Indeed I do," she answered. "It is not right to do things behind any one's back you would not do before his face."

"I suppose you mean her face, Honie."

"Her, his, or its, whichever you please. I

often fret about the way you and Clara deceive Mrs. Lessant, and now you want me to be deceitful also."

"I want you to sing for me, if you call that being deceitful."

"Well, you know Mrs. Lessant does not want me to sing, and I should despise myself if I could take advantage of her absence to do what would vex her. It is wrong, too, of you to tempt me. There is nothing I love as I do music. I cannot tell you the pleasure it is to me even to touch the keys of a piano. When people have been playing and singing here, I dare not even look at them lest they should see in my face *how I love it all*. I am not fond of Mrs. Lessant, but so long as I stay in her house I should not like to act dishonourably towards her."

"A most creditable sentiment admirably expressed."

"It is not creditable; it is only right. If you trusted a person, how should you like to find him—her—false the moment you left them."

"My dear cousin, you ought to take a few lessons in grammar."

"Don't turn all I say into jest," she entreated. "I am not clever in expressing myself as Clara is, but you know quite well what I mean, and you know too what I say is right."

"From your point of view undoubtedly it is."

"There must be a right and there must be a wrong from any point of view."

"Yes, but not the same right or the same wrong. For instance, we should think it wrong as well as disagreeable to eat our grandmothers, and yet certain tribes consider the practice meritorious."

"Don't be ridiculous," expostulated Honoria.

"Now is not that always the way with ladies?" said her companion, addressing an imaginary audience. "One never can argue with them. One never in fact can state a positive truth in their presence without being requested not to be ridiculous."

"Well, you are ridiculous," persisted Miss Honie; "what have the people who like to eat

their grandmothers in common with rights and wrongs in England?"

"Only that even in England there may be half-a-dozen rights and half-a-dozen wrongs."

"Oh! fie! and you a clergyman."

"Softly, Honie. In the first place, were I a clergyman, what I state is a matter of fact and not of opinion; in the second, I am not yet a clergyman. In the third place, perhaps I never shall be."

"Never shall be!" In sheer amazement Honie dropped her work and stared across at the speaker with upturned face and eyes well dilated. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"Why, I thought it was a settled matter."

"So it was, but matters can be unsettled as well as settled. The fact is, the whole idea of my going into the Church originated with my mother. All mothers, I think, would like their sons to be clergymen. From the time I was quite a little fellow she dinned the idea into me. I was brought up to be a parson, educated for

one. Never had a notion of being anything else till quite lately."

"And lately," suggested Honoria as he paused.

"There is no use in beginning a story unless one means to finish it, is there?" said the young fellow with an uneasy laugh; "and indeed I don't know why I stopped in my story, since, next to Clara and my mother, I like you better than any woman I have ever known. The truth is," he went on after a slight hesitation, "I have found out here what I suppose I ought to have found out long ago—that I am not fit to be a clergyman. I have no 'call,' as the Dissenters would say, to the life. I should be as much out of my element as a clergyman as you would be if you were, with your nature, Mrs. Lessant's daughter. Indeed, Honie, you were quite right in what you implied just now. Had I ever been fit to preach, I could not have gone on deceiving Mrs. Lessant—"

"But what in the world then are you and Clara intending to do?" asked Honoria.

"You are more practical than I imagined," he

answered, laughing this time quite freely and unaffectedly. "I fully expected you to lament over my shortcomings, and, instead of doing anything of the kind, you want to know how I propose to live. You are improving under Mrs. Lessant's tutelage. She is developing an amount of common sense in which the Miss Honoria Legerton, who nearly fainted the first night she came here, was singularly deficient."

The Miss Honoria Legerton referred to reddened, bit her lip, and retorted,

"My sense or want of it has nothing to do with you and Clara. How, as you put the matter, are you going to live?"

"I am going to be partner in the Hillfordshire Bank."

"In the Hillfordshire Bank?"

"In that establishment," he said. "I will stand up in order to give you a better opportunity of fully surveying the new partner. When the arrangement is completed and mentioned to Mrs. Lessant, she will be told at the same time that Clara and I want to be married."

"Well, I am astonished," exclaimed Honoria.

"You do not congratulate me."

"I do with all my heart," and the girl rose also and impulsively held out both her hands towards him. "I only wish," she went on as he clasped the hands thus offered, looking at her the while with a loving admiration as sincere as it was merely friendly — and oh! how rarely that precise sort of admiration is offered to a woman! — "I could have such a chance. What a thing it is to be only a girl! I don't envy you, Tom, it is not that; but I do wish I had been a man. Could not I have helped my father and mother then?"

"You will marry well. As Clara says, you deserve an earl with a long rent-roll."

"Ah!" said Honie, "Earls don't want girls like me, and if they did I might not like them. No, I shall never marry, and I fear I shall never make any money. I thought I had one gift—but—"

"You have. Clara is positive about that. It is only some stupid notion Mrs. Lessant has got

into her head which prevents her always keeping you playing and singing here. My mother once offered to make her up bows or furbelows or something else she admired, and she declined lest the 'servants might think Mr. Lessant's sister had been a milliner.' On the same principle she is afraid people might imagine you to be a professional singer. Clara and I have had many a laugh about it. And now come to the piano."

"I will not," said Honoria with an outward decision suggestive to the initiated of much inward weakness. "Nothing should induce me to play or sing in this house without Mrs. Lessant's permission!"

"But she told us especially to amuse ourselves," he expostulated, moving as he spoke towards the instrument. "Do be good-natured. I am so tired of Theresa's thumps and bumps and mathematical accuracy. Carder says he would rather hear a metronome, and so I declare would I. Tick-tack, tick-tack is better than tum-tum-tum-di-dow di-dum any day. Now do put down that stupid work. Do, Honie."

But Honie only devoted herself more sedulously to her stitching, and never even made any answer to his request.

"I shall come and take it from you in a moment," he said jestingly; "only I must first arrange everything for your ladyship here."

Then suddenly he broke into a hearty fit of laughter.

"Oh! it is too delicious," he exclaimed. "What do you think? You were not considered fit to be trusted after all. *The piano is locked!*"

CHAPTER XI.

AT ELM VALE.

A PLEASANT room—a breakfast table prettily set out with flowers and fruit, sunny landscapes hanging on the walls, the curtains of creamy-coloured mousseline-de-laine, relieved with bunches of rosebuds and green leaves, thrown carelessly here and there by way of pattern, linings of pink, which showed delicately through the material, gimp and fringe green to match the leaves; carpet to match the curtains, almost a white ground with roses and lily-leaves, and the dainty lily-bells scattered over it. Easy-chairs, easier couches, girandoles between the windows, mirrors reflecting back the garden and some magnificent trees, everything in the apartment simple, pretty, bright, expensive—yes, very ex-

pensive, though the costliness was never suffered to obtrude itself upon the eye, in which respect the house differed from that of Mr. Lessant, where what with gilding and colour, and pretentious upholstery, and a general glare and glitter of "brass and glass," the eye never found the rest it sought, the mind never could feel quite quiet.

Whereas at Elm Vale the prevailing tone was repose. If Elm Vale did nothing else, it lulled the senses into a delicious peace.

There was something about the cool green lawns, shaded by giant trees, the sweet mingled scent of flowers, the rustling of the wind among the trees, which, like a soft voice in woman, seemed very excellent.

Some houses possess this charm in an intense degree; the moment a stranger crosses the threshold he seems to enter a lotus-land of quiet and contentment.

Instinctively he takes possession of it as home; and often in the aftertime, when he has long left behind him all save the memory of softly

flowing waters and whispering leaves, of kindly smiles and tender tones, his heart goes back from the world in which his lot is cast, and broods over the peace and the beauty of days that can return no more.

Essentially Miss Carder was a woman who knew how to make her house a home.

"You see," she would sometimes remark to people who wondered at her extreme success in a line where so few achieve any great result, "I have no theories as to how visitors can best be entertained, so I just leave my guests alone, and I find they like the place; on the other hand, I have my little fads about beauty and comfort, and not owning chick nor child nor husband, I can devote a great deal of time to thinking how the place can be made prettier. Parents who have boys and girls to educate and put out into the world, and marry and provide for, have no leisure for such pleasant foolings. A dozen little feet running in and out of the rooms, and over the flower-beds in the gardens, would soon necessitate a different order of things."

She was a pleasant cheery lady who talked thus, not more than middle-aged, yet looking almost elderly. She affected dark colours and rich materials, she wore her black hair braided under a pretty lace cap; there was always about her neck something soft and snowy white; in her ears she wore ear-rings, though at the time of which I write they had ceased to be fashionable, whilst on her thin white fingers sparkled diamonds and emeralds and many another precious stone, for she was one of those women who can with impunity array themselves like Solomon in all his glory,—the while others of their sex dare scarcely don attire simple as that of the lilies of the field. On her nothing looked too rich or too rare for common use; in and about her beautiful house she moved, looking, for all her silks and laces and jewellery, simple and “fitting,” like the house itself. In her costly dresses she overshadowed the beauty of no young girl, however girlish and plain her attire might be; rather she seemed by even her presence to lend a new beauty and grace to youth, giving ease

to inexperience, and inducing timidity to forget its fears.

A charming woman, yet with an individuality of character, strange in one sometimes given to sacrifice overmuch to the proprieties; a woman whom her brother loved with a love passing that generally felt by brother to sister, to say nothing of the very different affection often held in the more difficult and anomalous relationship of half-brother and half-sister.

"Never talk to me," Arthur Carder at one time of his life had been wont to say of "sweet seventeen." "My idea of what a woman should be is my sister fifteen years older than myself. Find me another like her, and I will marry at once if she were twenty years my senior"; while to his sister he was wont to say, when she remonstrated with him on his preference for a single life, "You have spoiled me, Alice; spoiled me utterly for a lady love who after marriage would wear a dressing-gown, and expect me to eat my breakfast with half-a-dozen rampant young urchins for company. I have been fashioned into

a sybarite, and a sybarite I shall remain to the end of the chapter."

After all of which statements he proposed for Beatrice Lessant, and became engaged to her.

"Are you not going to have some peaches, Arthur?" asked Miss Carder, on the morning when I beg leave to make my readers free of the house and estate of Elm Vale. "Hewson brought them in first thing, because, as he said, Master Arthur always was fond of peaches."

"Peaches are for an easy mind," remarked the gentleman addressed, "and mine is not easy. Remember I am about to depart for Wimpledon."

"My poor Arthur!"

"Poor indeed! but what must be must be. So not to frustrate fate, here goes," and he rose as he spoke, and with a wistful look round the pleasant room, prepared to leave it.

"You cannot return, I suppose, before you go to the train?"

"Alas! no," he said with a comical look of regret.

"Well, good-bye then, dear," and his sister

graciously inclined her face for the kiss which since his childhood Arthur Carder had given on each parting and meeting, even for or after a very few days, to the woman to whose love and generosity he owed so much.

This time, however, he fairly took her in his arms. "Good-bye, Ally," he said, lingering over the farewell. "If you only knew how I hate going, you would pity me. By-the-bye," he added, turning when he had just reached the door, "if you have nothing much to do while I am away, you might just call at Jersey House and say a pleasant word or two to Honie Legerton; she would appreciate the kindness, I am sure."

"Honie Legerton!" repeated Miss Carder. "Stop, Arthur—come back for a minute, and tell me what you mean. Has Mrs. Lessant—has *that woman* left the girl at Jersey House, all by herself?"

"Well, no," said Mr. Carder, re-entering the room, "Tom Fleming is left there also."

"With Honie alone?" in a gradual crescendo.

"There is nothing wonderful in that, I suppose."

"My dear Arthur, how you talk! I never heard of such a thing. Do you really mean to tell me there is no one at Jersey House except Honie and that Mr. Fleming?"

"And Horman and the cook and the kitchen-maid, and a footman and a coachman."

"There, there, stop," entreated Miss Carder, a pretty pink flush tipping the top of each cheek. "I have heard quite enough, quite. I shall drive over at once and bring the girl here. I knew her mother very slightly, but what I did know of her I liked; and I love Honoria, Arthur, and she shall not be placed in a false position if I can prevent it."

"But, Alice—"

"If Mrs. Lessant is offended with my interference, she must be offended, that is all. Here the girl comes—on that I am determined."

"You are the kindest woman that ever lived."

"I should be the unkindest if I could know of a girl being placed in a most false position, and not try to help her out of it."

"God bless you, Alice," and he hesitated for a moment as if about to say something else, then suddenly changing his intention, he kissed his sister once more, and saying, "Well, now I really must be off," departed.

As for Miss Carder, she laid her hand on the bell-pull, and said to the servant who appeared in answer to her summons,

"The pony-carriage in half an hour, Ewings, and send Power to me."

Now Power was Miss Carder's maid, and the dialogue which ensued was this,

"Power, I am going to Jersey House in half an hour."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Mrs. Lessant and her daughters, as perhaps you may have heard, left for Wimpledon yesterday, to be present at Lady Flora's wedding; my brother follows them to-day."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Miss Legerton will stay here during Mrs. Lessant's absence. She will return with me, she must have the chintz room, it is the brightest

and prettiest in the house; see that it is ready for her, Power, if you please. Get a nice bouquet of hot-house flowers, and place them where they will be most conspicuous. Tell Hewson they are for Miss Legerton, and he will not grumble about cutting them. And now look out my things. I shall be upstairs in five minutes."

When she arrived at Jersey House, Miss Carder found Honoria seated in the drawing-room, a book in her hand, her work on the table. With a bright look the girl sprang up to greet her visitor.

"My poor child," cried Miss Carder, "how cruel you must have thought me not to come over last evening!"

"How kind it is of you to come now!" said Honie.

"Until an hour ago I had not the faintest idea you were here and alone; now I have come to fetch you. Run away and pack the few things you will require, and we will drive back together."

"But Mr. Fleming?" suggested Honoria.

"Must amuse himself in the absence of his relations."

"No," said Honoria, sitting down again resignedly, and folding her hands together; "I should like to go with you of all things, but I cannot do it. Mrs. Lessant told me particularly to strive all I could to prevent time hanging heavily on Mr. Fleming's hands, and though I am afraid he finds me very stupid, still I am better than nobody."

"You are better than most somebodies," agreed Miss Carder, with disconcerting heartiness, "but now what are we to do with the young fellow? Cannot he come and stay at Elm Vale too?"

"Oh! Miss Carder," exclaimed Honoria in an ecstasy.

"There! it is all settled now. I will write to Mrs. Lessant and take the whole responsibility on myself. Where is Mr. Fleming? Gone to Dilfield; scarcely gallant I call it; but never mind, give me some paper and I will leave a note for him. Now no more 'noes,' little wo-

man, or I shall think you dislike me and Elm Vale."

"I love you and I love Elm Vale," said Honie, and for a moment, relieved from the incubus of propriety which usually enveloped Jersey House, the girl's nature broke loose, and throwing her arms round Miss Carder's neck, to that lady's intense astonishment, she kissed her impulsively. Next minute, covered with confusion, she was begging pardon for her boldness.

"I have known so few people before, I ever cared for," she explained; "none indeed except mamma and Mrs. Caruth, that I forgot what I was doing. Pray forgive me."

Miss Carder laughed, as she settled her bonnet and tucker, which Honoria's impetuous charge had disarranged.

"There is nothing to forgive. I confess I do like to see young people act unaffectedly upon occasion, but only think how shocked Mrs. Lessant would have been."

"She would have called it 'an exhibition,' as indeed I am afraid it was," said Honoria ruefully.

Miss Carder laughed again, and bade the girl attend to her packing.

At the door, however, Honoria was seized with a fresh misgiving.

"But what will Mr. Lessant do when *he* returns?" she asked.

"Just what he would do, I suppose, if you were back at Antlet. Mr. Lessant is quite accustomed to be left alone, and I believe he likes it. Further, when no one is at home he is fond of spending his evenings with us. I should not care, of course, to disturb Mrs. Lessant's peace of mind by such a statement, but I really do think Mr. Lessant has a sincere attachment for me. He says I am the only really sensible woman he ever met. Complimentary to his own womankind, is it not?"

What a drive that was behind Miss Carder's pair of "rats" as Miss Beatrice Lessant's *fiancé* styled his sister's ponies, a drive through shady lanes straight away into fairyland.

Never before had Honoria Legerton felt so

happy. Never before did days glide by so peacefully with such a sense of contentment.

As for Miss Carder, she was delighted with the result of her experiment. So far from Mrs. Lessant taking umbrage at her interference, she wrote to thank her for it with a cordiality as warm as it was unfeigned.

"Her dear friend" had laid her under the deepest obligation. If she dare have proposed such a plan, nothing could have gratified her more than Honoria's visit to Elm Vale.

"There *were many reasons*," went on Mrs. Lessant, "why it was impossible for me to bring her here, and your kindness has removed the only drawback to our enjoyment. And, then, *how* am I to thank you for extending your invitation to Tom Fleming also. You must be a witch, I think, thus to have guessed at a wish which indeed lies very near my heart.

"At Antlet, I fancy, there is not the remotest chance of Honie meeting with anyone likely to marry a portionless girl, and if she and Tom should arrange matters to their mutual

satisfaction, how delightful it would be to announce such good tidings to my oldest and dearest friend! Poor Marion, such a marriage would go far towards consoling her for the misfortunes of her own life. Mr. Lessant would push Tom's interests, and the girl herself, happily, has not a single extravagant taste."

"Humph!" said Miss Carder to herself, when at last she folded up Mrs. Lessant's epistle and placed it in her desk. "It is a new thing for her to plan marriages for other folks' girls; but as matches go, this one would be very suitable—very suitable indeed."

For which reason she left Honoria and young Fleming much to their own society, giving them indeed ample opportunities for falling in love, had they felt disposed to do anything of the kind.

At the end of three days Mr. Carder returned to Elm Vale. Lady Flora was married, he stated, and Mr. Lessant ill. As it was impossible for the senior partner to come back to Dilfield, he, Mr. Carder, had left Wimpledon in order to see

to affairs at the Bank. It would be necessary also, he stated, for him to run up to London on business; altogether Mr. Carder seemed to have his hands pretty full.

Nevertheless, he found time to spend many hours at Elm Vale, and tried to make her visit happier to Honoria even than his sister had done.

"You might get up a little dance, Alice," he suggested. "The girl would enjoy, I am sure, one evening free from the Argus-like scrutiny of dear Mrs. Lessant. After all, admirable as Fleming is, I do think she must sometimes get tired of him for a partner. Besides, she was cheated out of that great affair at Littleham, and I know she looked forward with delight to the prospect of dancing in the house which belonged to her grandfather."

"Why did she not go after all," asked Miss Carder.

"It is a delicious story; Clara told it to me at Wimpledon. Mr. Lessant, it appears, like a generous creature as he is, proposed to give Honoria a dress for the occasion, which, after

some persuasion, she agreed to accept; indeed, she could not have done otherwise without seeming ungracious, for, whatever Lessant's faults may be, he is as kindly and considerate a man as ever drew breath."

"Of course he is, but I am longing to hear the whole of your story."

" 'I could buy a silk or a satin for you, my dear,' he said to his wife, 'but I should be scarcely a judge of the sort of thing a young thing like Honie should wear. Here is a twenty-pound note, and if she wants any little fallals extra, tell me, and I will pay for them.' "

"What extravagant ideas the poor man has!" sighed Miss Carder. In those days most women had some conscience about the matter of dress; while in these they have none.

"He has graduated in a good school," remarked Mr. Carder. "However, to return to our story, Mrs. Lessant took charge of the twenty pounds. Honie was told to make her mind easy, and that a suitable dress should be forthcoming.

“Whether the girl speculated concerning its texture and colour, Clara could not tell me, though she says she believes Honie dreamt at night of some white floating material over either a blue or a pink silk slip, but at all events the evening of the ball came. Honie had her hair dressed, her gloves on the table, her bouquet ready, and then Mason, with great fuss and bustle, brought in a yellow silk which Honoria at a glance recognised as a former possession of Trixy’s and detested by her.

“The dress, I believe, was beautifully trimmed and looped up with clematis wreaths, but the young lady would have none of it. She did not make a remark except to tell Mason she did not require any assistance, but when every one was ready she was found arrayed in the *barège* she usually wears in the evening when there is no company, and explained she did not wish to go to the ball.

“Mrs. Lessant reasoned with her, and even condescended to entreaties; so did Miss Lessant; so did Trixy; Clara says they might as well

have talked to a mule. She stood beside the dressing-table and answered never a word, except that she would "rather not go," and at last Mrs. Lessant had to bustle downstairs, and tell her husband Honie was not well.

"Of course he wanted to send for a doctor, so she had to make up some story about an hysterical attack, and say Mason could do all that was necessary.

"Lessant, however, it appears, when they arrived at Littlesham, got Clara into a quiet corner, and that young lady, who delights in setting all her relations by the ears, told him the story. Next morning you may be sure there was a nice little storm. Honie wanted to leave at once; but, however, the matter was arranged somehow, and peace restored."

"What a mean wretch Mrs. Lessant is," exclaimed Miss Carder, "pretending to be so fond of the girl too, and so anxious for her to marry young Fleming."

"There is no pretence about that," was the answer. "She would like young Fleming to

marry anybody who could prevent his making love to Clara."

"And is he making love to Clara?" asked Miss Carder in amazement.

"Yes! though Mrs. Lessant has no idea of the fact."

"Bless me!" ejaculated Miss Carder, and sat down to consider this fresh complication at her leisure.

CHAPTER XII.

HONORIA'S SUCCESS.

A FORTNIGHT passed—the happiest Honoria Legerton had ever spent. Mr. Lessant was sufficiently recovered to fix a day for his return. Mrs. Lessant wrote frequently, and thickly sprinkled her letters with thanks for her dear Miss Carder's kindness. Mr. Carder had made a hurried journey to London, and was back at Elm Vale. Mr. Fleming voted Miss Carder's house "the jolliest place in the world," whilst as for Honoria, her heart had turned disloyal to Antlet. "There could not," she wrote to her mother, "be a more beautiful home than this."

What she said was true so far as it went, for she had seen Elm Vale only in the bright holiday weather, with its inmates well, happy, and

cheerful; with an air of festivity pervading the rooms; with plenty of money to keep up all the appointments such a place exacted. No one in or about the establishment ever seemed sick or sorry; inside the house as well as out there was sunshine; and Honie had not yet attained to those years of discretion when people realize, that to every summer there must succeed winter; to all gaiety—sorrow; to all brightness—shade.

Ah! friends, who amongst us, that has lived long enough to know anything of the world, but can recall many and many a sunny picture, the memory of which he has carried about in his heart through years of change and chance.

A quiet noontide, with the sea calmly rippling in on a sandy shore; a river with moonlight peeping through bough and branch and leaf upon the water; a shaded lawn, gardens ablaze with flowers; pretty women in pretty dresses, grouping themselves with unconscious grace and picturesqueness; a snug drawing-room with a blazing fire; a walk in the evening over the

downs, or across field-paths bordered by beans in flower, or grass fit for the mower. But trifles each and all it may be, and yet they form a gallery such as no artist could paint—no money purchase.

And then the possessor must needs go and spoil these pictures, which can be reproduced in their integrity never more. With his outward and bodily eyes he longs to verify the accuracy of his recollection, and so he goes back to find a dull sky brooding over a desolate shore from which the tide is slowly ebbing; a drizzling rain falling where the moonbeams played at hide-and-seek with each other in the water; leaves knee deep on a neglected sward where once a gay company made even flowers (now dead and sodden) seem more beautiful; stiffness and propriety rampant in the remembered drawing-room, where once on a time comfort was everything, and the world's conventionalities disregarded; new houses springing up like toadstools where the beans gave forth their fragrance, and a brick-field, in full inodorous operation, where the scythe of

the mower made music amongst the swarth of the luxuriant meadow.

No; memory gives us many a canvas of which we should never try to see the reverse side; or, indeed, the original side under changed conditions.

After years we look no longer with the same eyes; what was once beautiful seems fair to us no longer; what was formerly music sounds like discord. But of this kind of experience Honoria's young life held as yet no knowledge, and she thought that always Elm Vale would seem to her the fairest, sweetest home in the length and breadth of England.

It contained everything likely to appeal to an artistic temperament. To Honie, it was a positive pleasure to walk through the pretty rooms, to stroll through the exquisitely kept gardens, to stand dreaming amongst the flowers in the conservatories.

Further, now and then she touched the piano, always with a trembling sense of wrong doing, which lent a sort of fearful joy to the indulgence.

All in vain Miss Carder deprecated her scruples, and stigmatized Mrs. Lessant's prejudices as those of a narrow-minded, illiberal woman; Honie could not be convinced that she was acting with strict honour towards her relative.

"Had she asked me not to play or sing while at Dilfield, nothing in the world could have induced me to do so," said the girl one day, as she sat at the Erard grand, her fingers just touching the keys.

"If she had even trusted me and left the piano unlocked, I am sure I should not have played, even for you. I think she might have trusted me."

"Mrs. Lessant never trusts any one," remarked Miss Carder.

"You will not ask me to sing to-morrow night?" went on Honoria. "I should not like to make any fuss or seem ill-natured, but I should like still less to offend Mrs. Lessant."

"Absurd!" commented Miss Carder.

"But if there is anything you wished me not to do—"

"My dear child," interrupted Miss Carder, "I quite fail to imagine making myself so ridiculous as Mrs. Lessant has done, or rather as Clara states she has; for, indeed, I do not take every one of that young lady's statements literally. However, if it is any comfort to you, I will promise not to ask even for a single song. I cannot promise for Arthur, however."

Arthur proved, however, even more compliant than his sister.

"We had better not rouse the sleeping lion of Mrs. Lessant's temper," he remarked, when just before the arrival of their guests his sister broached the subject. "I do not fancy she would ever forgive any of us if Honie were to 'bring down the house' at Elm Vale. Indeed, I am afraid she will never forgive us for daring to have a party during her absence. Heigho! what a charming mother-in-law she will be." And then he looked at Honoria, but instantly averted his eyes as if something in the sight of her pained him.

Nevertheless, she was a fair enough object at

that moment to have pleased most people. Miss Carder had pronounced her "lovely"; and indeed, with her slight girlish figure, clad all in softly flowing white; with her pale mobile face, from which every trace of sun-burn had long before departed; with her beautiful eyes, out of which the childish look of eager and superabundant vitality was fading to give place to a wistful tenderness—Honorina might have been called almost beautiful. Critically speaking, that she never could be; but, after all, it is not chiselled features and faultless figures that win hearts and retain them; but rather the inexplicable something which steals into the affection of its fellows, and winds its way into human citadels that could never be won by all the artillery at the command of even the handsomest woman on earth.

The change Mrs. Legerton had felt in her daughter's letters was visible in her appearance.

Mother or lover had never seen her look as she did that evening, standing at the open window gazing out into the twilight.

Very shortly the expected guests began to

arrive. There were not many, for Miss Carder had only made up a little party for Honoria's benefit; but, as every one who had been asked came, quite enough young people appeared to fill with dancers the large low hall and the dining-room as well. Never had Honie been so happy before. Passionately fond of dancing, she had never been known since she came to Dilfield to plead fatigue or disinclination when a partner offered. The awkwardest man who ever trod on a lady's skirts, or floundered through a waltz, found favour in Honie's eyes. If she could not get the best, why, she was satisfied, even if what she had proved very bad indeed.

"She will learn to be a little more 'difficult,' when she knows the world better," Mrs. Lessant was wont to remark loftily to contemporary dowagers; whilst to Honie herself the three pairs of lynx-like eyes that watched her movements, and criticized her sins against etiquette afterwards, were as drops of bitterness in her cup. Whatever of pleasure she had overnight,

she was well aware would be turned into pain the next day; indeed, but for Clara, she must sometimes have sunk under the withering politeness of Mrs. Lessant's hints, and lapsed into despair when Beatrice took up her parable, and hoped she would not be considered officious if she "offered a suggestion."

Now all was changed; she could dance, she could talk, she could even laugh without a haunting dread of after consequences. She could eat an ice without being asked, "if she wished to ruin her complexion?" She could galope without hearing prophetically that such scrambling dances were only fit for hoydens; she could go to the door of the music-room, and listen with rapt senses while some of Miss Carder's friends were playing and singing, and expect no message from her chaperone wiling her away.

"Does not that young lady play?" asked a good-natured matron of young Fleming, as she watched Honoria's face of intense enjoyment the while one of Chopin's *Murmures de la Seine* was being performed.

"She plays beautifully," answered Tom, who knew nothing of the determination come to by Mr. Carder.

"How *very* odd! I always fancied, it must have been only my fancy, you know, that Mrs. Lessant said she was nothing of a musician."

"Mrs. Lessant does not think music good for her," explained the young man, vainly trying to repair his error.

"Too fond of it perhaps; I should judge so from her expression. Just look at her. Can you not tell almost what she is thinking of. Does she sing also?"

"Yes," said Tom shortly.

"Do you think she would sing something?"

"I am sure she would not; she has never sung in company since she came to Jersey House. Pray do not ask her; she will only refuse."

But the lady was too old a veteran to be put off by any such transparent devices; and crossing the room when the pianist had finished, and everybody was at leisure to listen, she said to Honoria,

"I have a great favour to ask you, Miss Legerton."

"To ask me," Honoria repeated naturally, perhaps, though scarcely with the politeness in which Mrs. Lessant was always trying to instruct her.

"To ask you," agreed the other smiling at her friends, and so taking a whole circle into her confidence. "I want one little song. We won't keep you from the dancers for any length of time; no, we are not so selfish; but you must be good-natured and sing us one tiny little ballad. Ah!" she went on addressing the company generally, "you did not know Miss Legerton was a musician of no mean order. She has kept her secret well; but a little bird whispered it to me."

Honoria looked at young Fleming, and knew he was the little bird referred to.

"I cannot; you know I cannot," she said to him piteously.

"She does not wish to sing," he explained, but it was not in his power to help her now.

The more unwilling a bird is to pipe, the more earnestly is he exhorted to begin, and Honoria stood bewildered amongst a group of persons entreating, praying, beseeching her for just one little song.

"I think, Honie," said Miss Carder at length, "you will have to gratify our friends."

"Since it is evident," added her brother, "that nothing else will satisfy them."

Thus exhorted, Honie, white as the dress she wore, moved towards the piano; sat down, took off her gloves, answered mechanically some question which was put to her concerning the lights, and essayed to begin.

By this time the drawing-room was full of people. Hearing the conversational hubbub, dancers left the hall and dowagers their supper. The doorway was quite blocked up; and men craned their heads over their neighbours' shoulders to see what was going on.

"Miss Legerton is at the piano." "Did not know she played." "No, she sings." "Anything extraordinary about her?" went about in murmurs.

"Hush! sh—sh," exclaimed Miss Carder, holding up a finger; and then there was heard a prelude—about as strong and effective as the faint rustle of a summer breeze through a bed of reeds.

Thrice Honoria tried to get out the first note, and thrice no sound rewarded her efforts.

"Courage, Honie," whispered Tom Fleming, "don't disgrace us all."

"Shut your eyes for an instant, and think there is no one in the room," advised Mr. Carder.

"You must not fail us at the last instant," said Miss Carder, cheerfully laying her hand on the girl's head.

Desperately Honie took her first leap. She said afterwards she had never experienced the same feeling but once before, and that was when a pony she was riding rushed at a gate, and went over it without hesitation.

Just a bar of doubt and weakness, and then the magnificent voice rose clear, and swelled

out into what seemed a volume of sweet sound. Never before had Honoria sung so well; never had she known so little what she was doing. A second self seemed to be making melody—not the Honie who played the accompaniment, but quite another person.

Her genius, which even the mother who loved her, had never fully appreciated, had risen at last, and was asserting its existence. Miss Carder, who thought she understood what the girl could do, stood amazed, whilst upon the guests the effect was to hold them spellbound.

Not a rustle broke the silence till the sound of the last note had died away, and then there arose such a murmur of delight and applause as made Honoria feel giddy.

“Sing something else, Honie,” said Mr. Carder, in a low voice, thrilling with pride and exultation, and with another tone in it besides, which the girl felt throbbing through her, though she did not then understand what it was.

“The ‘Old, old story,’ Honie,” prompted

Clara's admirer, and with a faint smile Honie as she was told—sang.

With even greater success, if that were possible. There was little in the music; there was less in the words; and yet both kept jingling that night through many a head ordinarily wise and sensible enough. 'Twas the singer made the song; and when Honoria finished, a score of voices entreated her to repeat it once again.

But Mr. Carder took her hand and drew it within his arm. "You must have mercy," he said, looking at her eager excited face. "Miss Legerton is not accustomed to so large an audience. She wants, I fancy, to go into a cooler atmosphere"; and he took her into the conservatory where she stood for a minute or two gasping a little, as if she had been running fast or frightened.

"It has been too much for you," he remarked, and again there was that something different in his voice which thrilled through every nerve of the girl's body. "This place too is close, and the scent of the flowers overpowering."

"The perfume makes me feel faint," she said soft and low.

"Shall we go into the garden?" he asked.

"Yes."

And they went.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE ROSE GARDEN.

IT was a perfect night; soft, tender, moonlit; a night such as memory loves to recall even in middle age; which, spite of the years of sorrow and bitterness that may have intervened, brings back with its recollection something of the glamour and illusion of youth.

Oh! summer night; had ever another before seemed so beautiful to the girl; did ever another to come seem so beautiful to her again?

The air was laden with scents. A hedge of sweetbriar divided the flower-garden, upon which the conservatory opened, from the rose-garden into which they passed.

Here was no gravelled walk—no beaten path—nothing but turf, soft and close and green—

turf whereon fairies might have danced to the music of the lily-bells as the night wind stirred among them down in their home by the tinkling stream.

The garden was enclosed by a belt of lofty forest trees, and sloped gently down to a rivulet that fell over a miniature cascade, as it made its way from the lake in the park beyond; down the stones it came leaping joyously, making a pleasant murmur as it ran. In the hottest day in summer there was shade and coolness in that garden, where the roses queened it in a stately solitude; and now, in the quiet moonlight, it looked like some nook stolen from Paradise, something too unreally beautiful to be true.

Here was every rose which money could procure and care foster; nothing was too common to be excluded—nothing too costly to be purchased. Down by the lily beds bloomed in their season the wild dog rose, whilst the cabbage rose and the York and Lancaster were assigned places among their more imperial sisters.

The air was full of fragrance, and from the

house came the sound of one of Lanner's waltzes, softened by distance till it seemed like music heard in a dream: a light breeze just rustled the leaves of the elm-trees, and touched the buds caressingly. It was a night to be enjoyed intensely; to be remembered long. Honoria felt happier than she had ever done before in all her seventeen years of existence.

Life seemed to her as beautiful and as dreamy as the tones of that distant music to which her heart kept glad time as she walked slowly on.

It does not often fall to the lot of any girl thoroughly to enjoy an evening. As a rule there is some slight cloud—some trifling drawback—some consciousness of awkwardness or want of tact; some little word which has hurt—some look which has wounded; some regret because others have looked more beautiful or had nicer partners or been arrayed in prettier dresses; but to Honoria that night had been one of simple unalloyed happiness. In her white muslin gown she had achieved success such as comes perhaps once in a lifetime. From the time she came

downstairs, and had been greeted by Miss Carder with the exclamation, "How sweet you look, child!" to that supreme moment when Tom Fleming's whispered "Well done, Honie," told how her song had been received, the evening had been one long delight. She had never thought of her dress or her face; never compared her attire and her appearance with that of any one else present. She had been simply happy; and if you, reader, have twenty thousand a year and are apparelled like the Queen of Sheba, you can be no more.

And yet as Mr. Carder looked at her, there was a pensive, almost sad expression on her face, which, in the transfiguring moonlight, appeared almost beautiful.

It is people of the gayest temperaments who are subject to those changes of mood.

The even dulness of some dispositions admits of no more variation of feeling than a gloomy November day; and it was the greatest charm of Honoria's mobile face that it never wearied the observer with eternal sunshine or continuous

shade; but kept him wondering whence came the brightness, and whence the cloud—to what feeling of pleasure or thought of pain, eyes and brow and mouth were silently answering.

As she watched the moon sailing high above the tree tops, the expression changed to one of yet greater wistfulness and gravity. In her ears still sounded the strains of that gay waltz: in the twilight of that summer's night she was still standing among the roses at Elm Vale, but her mind had gone on a journey, and her companion, wondering, whither, asked at last what she was thinking of.

"Of how the moonlight must be lying on the sea below our cottage at Antlet," she answered; "of the woods at the Hall, looking as they always do on such nights as this, like silver."

"You are tired of our tame scenery, then?" he said, "you are longing for the sea and the coast, and your own eagle's eerie on the top of the cliff?"

"Oh! no," only two words, but spoken softly and lingeringly.

"You are weary of the life we lead here?" he went on. "Well I dare say it does seem to you flat and uninteresting."

"It is a beautiful life," she answered. "I never thought any life could be so rich in everything worth living for as yours at Elm Vale. I have read descriptions of such homes, but never believed they could be real until I came here."

"And yet," he said, "my sister's is but a poor place in comparison to many owned by people in our own rank of life."

"I cannot think it," was the reply; "I know, of course, there are larger houses than Elm Vale, but that is not what I mean. There is everything here any one could desire to have or to see. You have pictures, music, friends, flowers, and the loveliest gardens on earth. If the house were ten times as large—if your gardens covered hundreds of acres—if you could drive through your conservatories, the place would not be so perfect as it is."

"You think so?"

"Indeed, I do. The first day I saw Elm Vale

I thought it only wanted, like the rose before moss was added to it, one more charm—”

“And that was—”

“The sea; but I do not think so now. It would destroy the peace which seems to reign here. Elm Vale would not be Elm Vale, with the waves dashing round, and the sea sobbing and moaning under its windows through the long winter nights.”

Still the moon sailed on over the tree tops; still there came from the open windows the delicious strains of that floating waltz; still Honoria's heart was full of a deep happiness, with which mingled no unrest. Life had not changed for her yet; though she stood almost on the very point where the brook meets the river, the careless rivulet was still laughing on its way, unconscious of the proximity of the darkling rushing stream in which all save its memory would be lost for ever.

Then, “Honorina,” said her companion—there was something in his voice she had never heard quivering in it before; something which made

her look up in his face with a swift surprise,—
“there is one thing I want to have at Elm Vale
always for my own.”

“What is it?” Almost unconsciously as she spoke the words she tried to withdraw her hand from his arm, but he laid his upon it and held it fast while he answered. “I want you, Honoria. I love you; I believe I always loved you from the first, but I never knew how much until to-night—until now.”

No need to hold her hand fast now, for she never made an effort to remove it from his grasp; she stood in the moonlight white as the roses near at hand, looking like one who had been dealt some mortal blow.

“I want you, Honoria,” he repeated; “lacking you I lack everything; having you, life would be what you said just now Elm Vale seemed to you—perfect. Stay with me, dear. Do not look at me in that way; I was wrong to be so abrupt. I did not mean to speak at all—but I could not help it. I love you so, that it will break my heart if I have to part with you.

You are shivering—you are cold," and he drew the shawl which had fallen partly off her shoulders tenderly about her, and taking her in his arms, kissed her unresisting lips over and over again.

"Let me go," she said at last faintly. It was not Honie Legerton's voice that spoke those words; no one had ever heard such an agony of anguish in any tone of hers—it was something born within the minute, and greeting the world with a wailing cry.

"What is it, darling?" he asked, lifting her face to the light, and looking in it anxiously; but she never answered him. She only slid out of his arms, and with a moan turned and left him.

"Honie, dear, speak to me," he entreated, hurrying after her; but she never even turned her head.

"Honie, one word"; but she only shivered and hurried on.

"Honie, do not go in till you are more composed; Honie dearest," and he tried to detain her, but she eluded his touch and glided on, a

white figure in the moonlight, silent as though she had been dumb.

When she reached the conservatory, she turned aside, and taking a narrow path leading to a French window opening into the morning-room, passed into the house, Mr. Carder still close behind her.

"Honie, stop for Heaven's sake; do not run the risk of meeting any one just now. Come out with me again. I will not say another word to distress you—only come," and this time his detaining hand arrested her progress, and made her turn her face towards him.

Her face; was it indeed Honie Legerton's? The light fell full upon it as she stood there dazzled and confused; and Arthur Carder, seeing it, understood. Involuntarily he released her arm, and she flitted away—a girl for the time overwhelmed and stricken dumb with shame, because of that which should be her pride—the knowledge that she is beloved and that she loves!

Well, no one living need have envied Arthur

Carder's feelings, as he wandered first out into the grounds, and then, compelled by conventional necessity, back into the rooms, whence guests were already taking their departure.

Afterwards he never could remember the later details of that party; he was quite unable to recollect the reason why Mrs. St. Maur and Lady De Vere subsequently informed his sister he was one of the most charming of men.

So far as he himself was concerned, he felt as if he were going mad. In simple desperation he led guest after guest to her carriage; assisted to shawl the ladies, shook hands with the men, all the time he was thinking of a face transfigured, he had looked on an hour before, and which he knew could never be his—never, though he had that night overlooked impossibilities and thought it might.

All things come to an end, and that party did at last. While the last guest in the person of a decrepit old gentleman was being assisted to his brougham, Tom Fleming said to Miss Carder, "I wish you would go up and see what

is the matter with Honie. I met her on the staircase looking like death itself, and spoke to her; but she passed me without a word, and going straight to her room locked and bolted the door after her."

"Is she ill? she seemed quite well when I saw her last," said Miss Carder, all in a fuss about her favourite.

"She has been out in the garden with Arthur since then," was the answer.

The words were nothing, but his manner implied a great deal.

"What do you mean?" asked the lady.

"You had better ask Arthur himself," returned the young fellow almost fiercely; then added next moment, "Oh! Miss Carder, I am afraid we have all been blind."

"Where is Arthur?"

"I will tell him you want him," said Tom Fleming, and next minute Mr. Carder was with his sister.

"What is the matter with Honie?" she asked, plunging at once into the heart of the subject.

"The matter with Honie?" he repeated with a poor attempt at indifference.

"Arthur, you have been flirting with her."

"*That* I have not."

"Then, what has happened? surely you have not—"

"Now, Alice, don't take that tone with me, I am in no mood to bear it; what is done is done, and all the talking in the world won't mend it. I must see Honie again to-night. There is something I want to say to her."

"Are you mad?"

"Pretty nearly, I think."

"Do you mean to say you are fond of the girl?"

"Fond! Yes, if you like to put it in that way. The word is as good as any other under the circumstances."

"Have you forgotten that you are engaged. Have you forgotten all the reasons which induced you to engage yourself—all the—"

"I have forgotten *nothing*," he answered. "For a minute to-night I may have been so happy

as to forget, but her face soon reminded me of my position. I cannot rest till I have seen her again. Bring her to me, Alice, and I promise you that I will try to—be hard to myself."

Miss Carder wrung her hands.

"What have I been thinking of?" she cried. "Where have my eyes been? Looking back, I can recall fifty things which should have warned me, and yet—"

"Looking back won't mend matters now," he interrupted. "There is only one thing you can do, and that is bring her to me. If you have any pity, Alice, bring her at once. You won't? then I must go myself."

"Stop, Arthur," entreated his sister, "think of the servants; think of—I will go," she added hurriedly, catching a remark muttered under his breath, "only give me a minute to recover myself. It has all come upon me so suddenly."

"Think how suddenly it came upon her," he retorted. "I was a brute," he went on; "if you had only seen the poor child's face as I saw

it last, you would not hesitate about doing what I ask."

"You promise me—"

"I can promise nothing," he said in the voice to which his sister had yielded from his youth.

"Only tell me this," Miss Carder asked; "what did she say?"

"That is a question easily answered—not a single word."

"Not a single word!"

"So much and no more," he said, opening the door for his sister to pass out, which she did without venturing any further remonstrance.

Very slowly she ascended the staircase, he watching her; softly she knocked for admission into Honoria's room; then again more loudly—then more loudly still. Mr. Carder heard her say, "It's only I, Honie," after which the key was turned and the door unfastened.

Silence—a long silence; not a sound of voices reached him, but at last the door unclosed again, and after a few minutes' delay his sister came to where he stood.

Miss Carder was crying. "Oh! Arthur," she said, "what is this you have done?"

With a gesture he silenced her reproaches. "Is she coming?" he asked.

"She is in my room, you will find her there."

"Thank you," he said gratefully; but he did not hurry to the interview—almost as slowly as his sister had gone up stairs, he went on his way; his head bent down, his hand idly touching the wall; his footsteps heavy, like one who is weary or carrying a burden.

And he was weary; he was carrying a burden; the whole of a young life spoiled; the whole of a girl's lost happiness.

"Honie." She was standing beside a stand filled with flowers; but never moved or answered when he spoke to her.

He would have taken her left hand, which lay listlessly upon some moss, in his, but she clasped both her own together.

"Will you not sit down?" he said, "I have something to say to you."

Without a word she seated herself, still keeping her head bent; her eyes downcast.

"Are you angry with me, Honie?" he asked.

"No."

He could scarcely catch the sound, but he knew it meant "No."

"Are you vexed with me?"

"No."

"Do you forgive me?"

"I have nothing to forgive."

Had she not? He knew better.

"I want to tell you something," he said; "when we were together just now, I forgot every one but you. I forgot Beatrice—my engagement—everything and person save yourself. Often I have been tempted to say as much to you before; but I always remembered and—stopped." He paused and hesitated; then, without regard for aught save love for that "plain and awkward girl," as Miss Lessant called her—he rushed on:

"I do not know why I ever did stop. I cannot tell why I ever hesitated—why should I

marry a girl I can never care for, when I love you and shall never love any one else. I never loved any one before. I never knew what it was to feel anything like what I feel for you—I——”

“I wish you would not talk any more.” It was the faintest whisper of a sentence, yet he heard it.

“Why, Honie, does what I say hurt you?”

“Yes.”

“You must not think of me as an engaged man; I am free. I feel to-night that I have taken the plunge and regained my liberty. All along I have understood I was making a fatal mistake. Beatrice never loved me. She could not love any one; and I, Heaven forgive me, not merely never loved her, but have felt lately that I hate her.”

With a gasping sigh Honoria rose to her feet. It was getting more than she could bear.

“Mr. Carder.”

“Yes, dear.”

“May I go now, please?”

"Not till you have said you will be my wife."

She reared her head with the pride which had descended to her from some remote ancestor; looked him for a moment straight in the face, and then said—

"I never will."

"Never, Honie—that is a long time."

"It is not a longer time than I mean," she said, clutching the back of her chair for support as she spoke.

"I will never marry you; even—even if—"

She could not speak the falsehood her woman's shame prompted her to utter, so it was left unsaid. "I could not take any girl's promised husband from her."

"But if the girl released him from that promise?"

"No."

"But if the happiness of a man's whole life depended on your marrying him?"

"No."

"You speak hard things, Honie, but you do not quite mean all you say."

"I do, every word; and more if I only could say it."

"That you hate me?"

"No."

"That you despise me?"

"No."

"That you do not love me?"

There came no answer.

"Honie"—he was quite close to her now—"do you love me?"

"No."

It was not true, and he knew it.

"Honie, look at me, and say that again."

Then she broke down; like an abashed child, she turned away her face, and covering it with her hands sobbed aloud.

"How can you be so cruel, Arthur, and she so young?" said Miss Carder at this juncture, stepping out of her dressing-room, from which

point of vantage she had heard every word of the conversation.

"You shall not stay here another moment," she added, addressing Honoria. "Come with me, dear," and led her away.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS CARDER TAKES THE REINS.

NEXT morning, long before her usual hour of rising, Miss Carder entered Honoria's room, and found the girl already up, dressed, and engaged in packing.

Her eyes were swelled with crying, there were red patches on the top of each cheek; she had evidently not slept during the whole night; her hands were trembling, and her face stained with tears.

"What are you doing?" asked her hostess.

"I am going away, please," and Honie bent her head, and folded her dress sedulously.

Miss Carder sat down and surveyed the preparations for departure.

"My poor child," she said at last; "we must

make the best of a bad business. I would not for all I have in the world Arthur should have acted as he has acted; but that is past recall. What we have now to think about is the battle we—you and I — have to fight. We must be allies, dear. Division between us would lead to complications incalculable. May I trust you, Honie? Will you be my friend?"

She took the girl's limp hand in hers, and held it while she went on—

"You must not leave me—not yet. Mrs. Lessant will be home to-day. To-morrow she will certainly call here. It is essential she should not suspect what has occurred; you are young, but I think you are brave, Honie. I know you are apt to be impetuous, but I believe you will listen to advice. At this moment your hand burns as if you were ill with fever; without your saying so, I know you have a racking headache; you feel so tired, I see that you can scarcely drag your limbs from your wardrobe to your box, and yet you talk of leaving me—of going from a place where I can keep you quiet, to

a house where you will be under the microscope from morning to night."

"I meant to go home," interrupted Honoria at this juncture. "I never thought of returning to Jersey House."

"The place where you should be at this instant is—bed. When you have had a cup of tea and a soothing draught and a sound sleep, we will then discuss future arrangements. Believe me, Honie, I want to act by you as your mother might if she were here. Arthur has gone. He will not be back for some days. Can you not trust me, dear?"

And pitifully she took the willowy figure in her arms, and put her cool soft hand on Honie's burning forehead, and kissed the vexed, harassed mouth before she said,

"You must lie down again, Honie; you will have a serious illness if you refuse to take advice."

"I will do anything you wish," Honoria, with the sweet instinct of loving obedience, which was an integral part of her nature, answered sadly,

and she began to undress herself, but suddenly turned so faint she had to sit down before it was possible even to begin the task assigned.

With quick deft fingers, Miss Carder unfastened her clothes. Before Honie knew what had been done, there was nothing left for her to accomplish except step out of her daily clothing, and let her tired head drop on the pillow so recently forsaken.

"About your hair, dear," suggested Miss Carder; "does it hurt you?"

"No," Honie answered; nevertheless she wearily raised her hands, took out a few pins, and immediately there fell around her such a wreath of hair as might have served for a garment to Godiva herself.

For a moment Miss Carder looked at the contrast between the pale tear-stained face and the long straight fine hair thrown so carelessly back upon the pillow; then her heart went out to the girl her brother loved so foolishly, and she said,

"You shall have some tea in five minutes, and

this afternoon I have a story to tell when you are well enough to listen. Meantime God bless and help you, poor little woman."

"You do not despise me, then?" Honoria whispered.

"No, dear—you would not have walked into this with your eyes open; and we neither are able nor want to be able to put old heads on young shoulders, and endue a girl in her teens with the knowledge of sorrow and evil possessed by forty."

"Ah!" said the girl, and she turned her face from the light with a weary gesture, which expressed her conviction that she already understood sufficient of sorrow and evil to satisfy her for life.

Some hours afterwards Miss Carder entering the room found Honoria up—dressed once again, and writing.

"I hope you will not be vexed," she said, "but I have just finished a letter home. I feel I ought not to stay here, and I am sure I never

could go back to Jersey House for more than a night or so."

As she spoke, she held the letter to Miss Carder, who took and retained it, while she thought over the position for a moment. No matter how sorry we may feel for, how truly we may sympathise with, the troubles of our friends, it is an undoubted fact that when they propose to relieve us both of their griefs and themselves, we receive the tidings with a gasp of mental relief.

We are willing enough to try to help other people, but eventually we find out that if any good is to be done, it is they who must help themselves. We cannot take their lives out of their hands, and do what we list with them; we cannot for them command success or love, or wealth or enjoyment, and if we could they would never be satisfied with the precise form of each of the goods enumerated we could compass for them.

Now, what Miss Carder felt was this. Without any doubt she liked Honoria Legerton

greatly; but, upon the other hand, if that young lady could be got out of Dilfield at once without any fuss being made about the matter, or any suspicions being aroused by her abrupt departure, Miss Carder felt a very good thing indeed would have been accomplished. Evidently she was not the kind of girl able to simulate a malady she did not feel, and what amounted to something much worse, she was the kind of girl who resolutely tries to fight against all physical ailments. Having but just passed through the first great crisis of her life, she was still sufficiently self-possessed to argue out the whole matter, and consult her own heart as to the best means of preserving her own dignity.

An exceptional girl; a girl, Miss Carder felt, she would devotedly thank Heaven to be rid of. How much she liked her she knew; how much her brother loved her she could imagine.

A dangerous young person, clearly. After all, if our way lies along the beaten tracks of life, where carriages containing the usual men and

women of our acquaintance congregate, the vague woman who proceeds on foot, or who rides a half-broken steed, is neither a safe nor a desirable companion.

There might be and there were serious objections to Beatrice Lessant as a sister-in-law; but the matter had long been settled. Mr. Carder could not in honour draw back from his engagement, and even if he could, Miss Carder knew it would not be well that he should.

The atmosphere of Elm Vale was not one in which any of the loftier qualities stood much chance of mighty development.

There were many good things which grew and flourished in it; to wit, grace, refinement, sweetness, kindliness, and an easy charity; but the air was not well adapted to encourage self-denial, self-dependence, or any other of the sterner and undoubtedly less attractive virtues.

From his youth upwards, Arthur Carder had never denied himself a pleasure his soul longed for; and if Miss Carder had not followed suit, it was simply because in her teens she substi-

tuted another god for self, and fell down and sacrificed before her brother's shrine.

She would have given him Honoria now if she could; but, as that was impossible, the next best thing was to get rid of the girl with all decent observance and discreet speed.

"I suppose," began Miss Carder, after a soliloquy, which, long as it has taken me to analyze, only lasted a few seconds, "you have told your mamma everything."

"I shall never tell her anything," answered Honoria with compressed lips, and a hard look in her face no one had ever before seen disfigure her mother's darling. Alas and alas! What was this which had come into her young life that she said she should never tell to the woman who loved her better than aught else on earth!

"May I see what you have written?" asked Miss Carder.

"I wish you to read the letter, if you please." There were not many lines in it, there rarely are in a letter dashed off at "the first intention."

"Dear Mother,"—never before had Honie so addressed Mrs. Legerton in writing — "I feel that I must go home, and yet I do not know how to get away. Will you manage it somehow? I am sure you want me. Will you say so for your own Honie?"

"Mrs. Legerton will wonder what has happened," said Miss Carder.

"Yes, but she can well do what I ask, and for the rest—wait till she sees me."

"And when she has seen you?"

"I will tell her I cannot tell her," explained Honoria, "and that will be enough. Oh! Miss Carder, you do not know my mother the least atom in the world."

Once again Miss Carder sat silent, thinking wearily; then she determined to throw herself on the generosity of the girl her brother had treated so cruelly.

"Yes," she said—"yes, the letter had better go. It is well you should leave Dilfield. I do not mean, Honie," she went on, "to speak to you like a child. I want us to talk over this

wretched business—one woman to another. I wish you clearly to understand the position.”

“I do understand it.”

“Pardon my contradicting you, but you do not at present; you think Arthur an unprincipled fellow.”

“Oh! no indeed,” and Honie clasped her hands and looked at Miss Carder with brimming eyes.

“Well, at all events he has acted like a man without conscience, principle, or honour. Engaged to one girl, he has still permitted himself to fall in love with another, and, what is worse, let her know it.”

“Miss Carder, would you mind; would you please not to talk about it any more?”

“My dear, we must talk about it. Arthur has behaved abominably. I suppose there is some excuse to be made for him, but with that we have nothing to do now—what we have to do with is his actual position. If he were to marry you—”

“You may be quite certain I should never marry him,” interrupted Honoria.

"If he were to marry you," resumed Miss Carder, "it would mean absolute worldly ruin. He is not rich. He has nothing except his share in the Bank. Were I to die to-morrow, I could leave him little except my furniture, plate, and pictures. At my death, Elm Vale passes away to a distant relation. Had I married and been the mother of children, my eldest son would have succeeded me; my life is not considered a good one, and I am, therefore, unable to insure it, except at a price I consider prohibitory. Each year I put aside a few hundred pounds for his ultimate advantage; but what is all I can save for a man like Arthur, when from his childhood he has been accustomed to every luxury? It is important, situated as he is, that he should remain on good terms with Mr. Lessant. It is well, indeed I may say it is essential, he should marry Beatrice."

"I am sure it is," Honoria tried to say, but somehow her parched lips refused to utter the words.

"You see how necessary it is that no un-

pleasantness should arise between us and the Lessants."

"I—I would have gone away this morning, but you would not allow me," pleaded Honoria.

"Of course not, the matter must be so managed that Mrs. Lessant shall never even suspect what has happened."

"But why should she suspect? If I say I am ill and want to go home, she could not think there was anything wonderful in that. And I am ill and miserable, and I do want to go home. I want to be where no one knows—I want to be alone. I never wanted to do anything so much as to leave Dilfield now this minute. Oh! Miss Carder, do let me go. I do not know how I shall ever be able to look Mrs. Lessant in the face again. I am so sorry and—ashamed."

"It was not your fault, you have done nothing to be ashamed of; you must act as I tell you, and then there will be no fuss and exposure. To comfort you I will tell you a story—mine. I have never told it before to any one.

"When I was young, as young as you, I went

to stay with some friends. It does not matter where they lived. I does not matter who they were. Theirs was a beautiful home—they had plenty of money and plenty of leisure; they had sons and daughters, and the days were happy as they were long. I had never been so happy before. I have never been so happy since. We rode, we walked, we drove—we used to row by moonlight, and sing songs to which the dripping oars flashed an accompaniment, and there was always with us Cousin Jack—poor Jack, as the older members of the family called him; dear Jack, as the boys and girls put it. Well, it was a long story in the acting, but it need not take long to tell.

“Before my visit came to an end, Cousin Jack was all the world to me, and I knew it. Mine had not been a nun-like existence. I had always been thrown amongst young people, perhaps silly young people. I had been the *confidante* of many a love story, and I was not so simple as to misunderstand the symptoms of the malady when it attacked myself. Further, I

believed Cousin Jack cared for me. He was a man of over thirty, and yet nothing seemed to please him better than talking to a girl who was not one half so well worth talking to as you, my dear.

"There came a day when he asked me to meet him early the next morning before any one else was stirring. 'There is something I want to say to you,' he began, and then my heart gave a great leap, and I felt the blood rush to my cheeks, and believed the supreme moment was at hand.

" 'I am afraid it will vex you,' he went on, and there came a shadow into his kindly eyes; 'we have been such friends that I think, that is I flatter myself, you will be sorry to know I have a trouble no human being can help me to bear.'

" 'Can I not?' I asked. It was a bold thing to say, Honie—many girls would have been too shy to speak such words, but I was not. I felt desperate; a moment before, he was mine as I believed, and then he was slipping away out of

my life. As a drowning man catches at straws, so I clutched at the chance his own sentence presented, and, as I have told you, said, 'Can I not?'

" 'No, dear; but still I should like you to know all about it.' It is thirty years—thirty long years ago, and yet I can recall the tone of his voice and the look in his face. I can recall the scent of the myrtle flowers littering the ground close by where we stood, and I can feel the light wind lifting the hair from my head, which seemed to be as hot as fire.

"Next morning I did know all about it. He was married. Had married directly he came of age—a woman far beneath himself in rank—who brought disgrace and ruin upon him, and then went mad, and who, even while he spoke to me, was confined in a private lunatic asylum.

" 'I never speak about her to any one,' he finished; 'but I thought it right only to tell you,' and then I knew he had guessed how it was with me, and told me himself his story that I

might understand what, I had hoped could never come to pass.

"That is the reason I am a spinster," went on Miss Carder after a minute's pause.

"That morning spoiled my life. I could of course have married over and over again, but I clung to his memory till it was too late to go back and begin a fresh love tale again. He has long been dead. She is still living. She is an old woman with white hair and wild wicked eyes, and I—well I know now, I did the last thing he would have wished me to do—stay single for his sake.

"Don't let Arthur's folly wreck your life, Honie, as I let my own folly wreck mine. It was the best thing that ever occurred for your happiness, my dear, that when you met him he had no right to care for you. Believe me, Arthur is the last man on earth to be happy with small means, or to make a woman happy if he and she were poor together."

CHAPTER XV.

HOME ONCE MORE.

To Honoria's surprise, nearly a week passed before there arrived any reply to her letter.

"Something must be wrong at home," she said to Miss Carder, who still insisted on her remaining at Elm Vale. "If I do not hear to-morrow, I must start by the first train—indeed I must."

"I think you will hear to-morrow," and Miss Carder's prophecy proved correct.

By the same post there came a letter to Jersey House, and as its contents may serve to explain Mrs. Lessant's tactics, the reader shall read Mrs. Legerton's epistle for himself.

"My dear Theresa,—

"I was about to write for Honoria to come

home when your note arrived. There is unhappily no necessity for any diplomacy about her return. Mr. Legerton has been very seriously ill, and though all danger is, I trust, over, still I should like Honie to leave Dilfield as soon as she possibly can.

"I have written to her at Elm Vale, saying I want her back at once. As for the hints you dropped, I can only say I am grateful for the interest you express in Honie—for the desire you so kindly say you have for her happiness. At the same time I feel quite confident your anxiety has led you astray. Honie is not like most girls of her age. She is neither vain nor foolish; and so far as she is concerned, I would trust her anywhere with any person. Little as she has seen of the world, I feel sure she could never mistake the ordinary courtesies of life for attentions such as you think she may have imagined were intended by the gentleman to whom Beatrice is engaged. I agree with you that it was perhaps scarcely wise for a young and inexperienced girl to sing before so large a

company; but no doubt her hostess pressed her greatly on the subject.

"Honie never was one to push herself forward, or in any way to wish to make herself conspicuous, and I do not think that less than three months' absence from home can have changed her whole nature. I am more obliged to you than I can tell for all the pleasure you have given her, and the society you have enabled her to see; but it is better she should come home. After all, a girl is never so safe nor so happy as when near her mother; and I want to see my daughter again sadly. Mr. Legerton is awake and wants me; so, with love and thanks, I must sign myself in great haste,

"Your affectionate

"MARION."

"Has mounted her high horse, Tessy," remarked Mrs. Lessant, as Miss Theresa finished reading the letter.

"Yes, naturally; I think it was a mistake saying a word about the matter. You know what

Arthur's manners are towards all women, and Honie is as simple as a baby. About her singing, you ought to have put her 'on honour' at the first, and no one here would ever have heard a note. She is a girl to be led—but not managed, as I have told you over and over again."

"Well, let us be thankful there seems some prospect of getting rid of her at last," suggested Beatrice, with a weary yawn.

"It is to be hoped we have tried the last experiment we ever mean to attempt in the way of benefiting other people's children," capped Miss Lessant.

"So far as I am concerned," agreed Mrs. Lessant, "no person who is occupying a lower social position than that we occupy shall ever again be asked to Jersey House—be that person male or female," added the lady as a side hint to Clara.

"She will be rushing in here presently," said Miss Beatrice, reverting to the Legerton question, "all in a fuss and fever, with her hair slightly on end and her cheeks all aflame, to know how

soon she can start for Frodsham, and how long it will take her to pack her boxes. She will not eat, she will not sleep, and the whole household will be made miserable till it sees her safely off."

"Here she comes and Miss Carder with her," observed Clara, looking down the drive.

"She means to go to-day," said Miss Lessant, and with the air of a prophet who already sees his prophecy fulfilled, she inclined her Roman nose over the collar she was embroidering.

"My dear child!" exclaimed Mrs. Lessant, when Honoria entered looking as unlike the dishevelled and excited maiden Beatrice had evolved out of her recollection as can well be imagined. "I am so glad to see you back here again."

"I have returned only to say good-bye," Honie answered. "Papa is, I am afraid, very ill, and I want to go home as soon as I possibly can."

"But not to-day, love, surely."

"I find," said the girl, with a quiet decision,

which was quite new to her manner, "that a train leaves about one o'clock, which I can catch quite easily. Mamma would not say anything about papa being ill unless he were very ill indeed. Here is her letter," and Honie handed over her mother's epistle to the lady of Jersey House.

"I heard from your mother this morning also," explained Mrs. Lessant, "but I should certainly not think from what she says that Mr. Legerton is in any danger. If you leave us to-morrow, surely that will be soon enough. To run away thus at a moment's notice is so dreadfully sudden, and Mr. Lessant is at the Bank and—"

"We drove round by the Bank," here interrupted Miss Carder, "and left a message for Mr. Lessant who was absent, telling him Honie meant to go by the one o'clock train. If she takes my advice she will go."

"When you take a brief, no good can come of contesting a case," said Mrs. Lessant with a suavity which savoured of relief. "Next thing to keeping a willing guest is to speed a parting

one—so now, Honie, consider the house your own; ring for Mason; send Horman for anything you may require; and one moment, love, before you go,” cried Mrs. Lessant, adding in a very audible whisper, “How are you off for money?”

“I have quite enough, thank you,” said Honoria, who had calculated that after feeing the Elm Vale and Jersey House servants to the best of her slender ability, she would almost to a shilling have enough money left to take her back to Ripley—*second class*.

Now in those days, and to a very poor and proud, and inexperienced young lady like Miss Honoria Legerton, travelling second class implied going through a considerable amount of mental humiliation; nevertheless, had the Company's rules allowed of her returning to Ripley in a cattle truck, Honie would have gone by that conveyance sooner than not return or borrow money from Mrs. Lessant.

And after all, as she argued with herself, what did it matter; she was shaking the dust

of Dilfield off her shoes; she would never return there again—never.

Had her mother given any other tangible or intangible reason for her return than the dreadful and unexpected tidings of her father's illness, Honie's soul would have rejoiced at the prospect of hurrying home.

But as matters stood she was going back to see him, and what could it signify (really) to her whether under the circumstances she left Dilfield as a millionaire or a pauper? She had had her short-lived triumph there, also her deep abasement, and now on the top of all other events came the tidings that in Antlet Cottage there was the unwelcome guest which presages the advent of another guess still more unwelcome, who with no gentle hand changes the whole of our lives for us—and keeps the world, for good or for evil, moving on.

Nothing could exceed Mrs. Lessant's kindness to Honoria on that memorable morning.

She was graciously pleased to ascend to the girl's room in person and ask Mason whether

she was certain she had everything she required. With her own hands she fetched up a particularly dilapidated parasol belonging to her visitor, and gave it to Mason to pack as though it were a jewel of price.

It is on record further that the direction labels of Honoria's luggage bore tokens of her bold caligraphy; and the cook said she was "willing to declare on oath," as if any human being desired her to do anything of the kind, that missus ordered more food to be prepared and sent up for Miss Legerton's luncheon, than fifty Miss Legertons could have eaten in a week.

At length all Honoria's modest belongings were packed, locked, strapped, and despatched by pony cart to the station.

The girl had swallowed a morsel of bread and half a glass of wine. She had said good-bye to Beatrice and Mrs. Lessant, and all the servants who were available for the purpose; and she and Miss Carder, and Theresa and Clara, were all packed away in the brougham,

and driving as fast as a great powerful horse could take them to Dilfield Station.

Clara sat holding Honie's hand, and Miss Carder liked Mrs. Lessant's youngest daughter for the action.

"Write to me, Honie, the moment you get home, and say how Mr. Legerton is—won't you, like a dear?" and the "dear," struggling with her tears, nodded an affirmative.

"Here's papa," said Miss Lessant with calm dignity, as Mr. Lessant, his red face looking somewhat curiously mottled with streaks of white, and wearing a snowy waistcoat, opened the brougham door.

"And Tom, too, I declare," added Clara.

"Yes, and Carder would have been here also, but he had a most unfortunate appointment at Braisfield. Left a message that I was to be sure and explain the matter."

"What, is Arthur *back*?" asked Miss Carder in amazement.

"Returned five minutes after you had called at the Bank, and was away again soon after.

Left a message, as I have said, to express his sorrow and all the rest of it. And I am sure he is sorry, Honie, to lose you, as we all are—there then, don't cry, cheer up a bit. Legerton's got the constitution of one in a thousand—never took much out of himself in any way. He'll pull through all right, never fear. It's men like me who drop off all in a minute—men who think too much, work too hard, eat too much, drink too much,—burn the candle at both ends. Eh? what is this? I am not to talk of dropping off! What, crying, Honie? oh! you foolish little girl, you do not mean to say you would be sorry if anything—sudden that is, you know—were to happen to me?"

"Indeed I should," she said, with a little gasping sob. "You have been very, very kind to me—and I am very fond of you."

"And I am very fond of you, Honie," he answered—long ere this they had left the others behind, and were pacing off together towards the booking office. "I have often thought how much I should like you for my own daughter.

There is one thing I want to say to you, Honie, before you go; if Mrs. Lessant has sometimes seemed a little—how shall I put it—scarcely just to you, a little given to overdrilling, don't attach any importance to what she may have said. She is an admirable woman, but just it may be a bit of a martinet, and she has brought up Tessy and Trixy on the be "ready, present, fire" system! and they do great credit to that system, undoubtedly. Still there must be people of all sorts to make up a world—and I like your sort, dear, greatly, indeed I do. Oh! I have got your ticket long ago, so we can go on talking till the train comes in. Let you pay for it? Indeed, I shall do no such thing. For once, Honie, just for once, can't you imagine I am your father, and take such a trifle from me as you might from him?"

At that moment Honoria's heart was very soft, her devil of pride lay exorcised by the genuine honesty of Mr. Lessant's speech—by the intense kindness of his manner.

"Poor papa is very differently situated from

you," she said, half gratefully, half in explanation.

"I suppose had he been rich he would have done for mamma and me what you do for Mrs. Lessant and your daughters. You know we have been always poor, and I have seen so little that I cannot tell what people in the world are like. Still I fancy to the end of my life I shall remember you as the most generous man I ever met."

An inconsequent speech, yet the banker seemed to understand and feel pleased with it, though he only said,

"Pooh, pooh! Honie, I have never been generous to you. Situated as you and I were, I could not be, but now I have brought you a little present I want you to wear when you get home; a present that may sometimes remind you of a true friend, to whom you can always apply if you stand in need of advice—or—or anything of that kind. Don't open the parcel till you get home, it is only a trifle and you might lose it; and that reminds me here is a note I have

written to your mother, it is upon business, and I must ask you to deliver it into her hands, when there are no visitors or anybody but yourself and her in the room. Ah! here is the train. I will put in the shawls and wraps while you bid Tessy and the rest good-bye. No, not another word about the ticket if you wish us to part friends."

And so saying, the good-natured, red-faced gentleman, with the help of a porter, put Honie's slender belongings save one large trunk into the compartment she was to occupy.

"And, guard!" said Mr. Lessant beckoning that individual aside confidentially, "just see that young lady is not disturbed, and be sure you attend her luggage at Wrainton, and—" here ensued the pantomime usual in such cases. Something was slid into the man's hand, and he touched his hat mysteriously and remarked, "that he was sure he did not expect it, and he was greatly obliged."

"Now, Honie, get in," said Tom Fleming, as the doors began to bang and a fearful activity

to prevail on the platform, and there ensued some kissing and shaking of hands, and Mr. Lessant helped her up a rather high step, and followed after to see that "all was right and the further window shut."

"Good-bye, my dear," he said, holding her hand tight in his, "God bless you."

Whereupon Honie, carried away by some unaccountable impulse, held up her lips and kissed the banker, tears running down her cheeks the while.

"There—there—don't fret, Honie, don't, there's a good girl," Mr. Lessant was beginning, when the words,

"Going on, sir?" put an end to his exhortation.

"You are keeping the train waiting, papa," cried Clara, and all in a hurry Mr. Lessant got out; the door was banged, a porter shouted "All right," the whistle sounded, the Misses Lessant posed themselves gracefully on the platform, and believed all the passengers were staring at and admiring them, Mr. Lessant and his

nephew took off their hats; framed by the window Honoria showed for a moment a white haggard tear-stained face — and then Dilfield was left behind; and the girl, all alone in the carriage, was able to lean back against the cushions, and resting her head against one of the divisions of the compartment, cry to her heart's content.

It was not until the whistling of the engine and the reduced speed of the train told of the first station being at hand, that Honie, taking her handkerchief from her face, looked with eyes dimmed and swollen at the autumnal landscape.

Already the beauty of the day was over. The sky was gloomy, covered with swiftly flying clouds, and a few drops of rain had drifted upon the window through which Honoria looked so cheerlessly. There was not much of the "Jersey equanimity" to be seen on her face, and aware of this, the girl drew down her veil and nestled into the furthest corner of the carriage till the train should have left the platform.

"Heathfield, Willowscope, and Wrainton only

this train," shouted out half-a-dozen porters. "No, ma'am," to an elderly lady, with spectacles, a basket, and a huge bunch of flowers, "not this train for Marshfields, the next."

"Going on, sir?" to a gentleman who had walked up the platform at a leisurely pace and was now walking back again in the same manner.

"Yes, Wrainton," was the answer; "open this door, will you?"

The porter turned the handle, found the door locked, and was just about to apply his key, when the guard came running up.

"Not that carriage, sir," he said, "I will find you a good place forward."

"I want to get in here," explained the gentleman. "I wish to speak to this young lady."

"Can't do it, sir! young lady was put in my charge at Dilfield."

"Confound you," said the other. "Open the door, she is my sister."

For an instant the guard hesitated, then glanced at Honoria and threw the responsibility on her.

"Of course, sir, you and the young lady must know best about that, and if she is agreeable, why—"

"You had better not come on," said Honoria, leaving her seat and letting down the window.

"But I want to speak to you particularly."

Once again the guard looked at the girl, and this time took his resolution.

"We cannot keep the train waiting here all day, sir, and I shall not open the door of that compartment, begging your pardon at the same time. There are plenty of good places further forward, and Mr. Lessant gave me very particular directions about looking after the young lady."

"Good-bye for the present then; I shall see you at Wrainton," said Mr. Carder, and he was turning away when Honoria stopped him.

"Do not come on," she entreated; "you must not."

"Now, sir," cried the guard, opening the door of another compartment.

"Do you really wish me to leave you?" asked Mr. Carder of Honoria.

"Really and truly."

"Well, I will do so then, but, Honie, say you are glad to have seen me."

"I am very glad to have seen you to bid you good-bye."

"It will not be for long. I shall be at Antlet before a week has passed."

"Oh! no, no—"

"Oh! yes, yes— All right, guard, I am not going on now," and giving half-a-crown to the man, he took Honoria's hand and held it as if he never meant to loosen his clasp again.

"Stand back, sir, stand back," shouted a porter, and almost mechanically he obeyed.

He took off his hat as the train steamed out of the station, and smiled at Honoria, who gravely shook her head in mournful farewell.

"He ought not to have done it," she thought, "he ought not," and yet she was glad he had done it, for there are few follies a woman will not excuse and forgive if committed for her sake by the man she loves.

It was almost twilight when the express stop-

ped at Ripley Junction, but through the gathering darkness, Honoria's keen eyes discerned, among the people on the platform, Mr. Warren.

"I was sure you would come," he said, assisting her out of the carriage and shaking hands with her two or three times over in his delight at seeing her once again. "Your mother thought you would not be here until to-morrow afternoon, but as I made out that you would get her letter in time to start at one o'clock, I felt confident of finding you here. Well, and how are you?"

"How is papa?" asked Honoria, ignoring both his question and the grasp he laid on her arm as he hurried her along the platform.

"Better, better," answered Mr. Warren; "only one trunk in the van, only one I think you said, Honie. Yes, that is your father's trap. Two of my horses are ill. Nothing has seemed to go well while you were away. We shall get right again now."

"Is papa able to leave his room?" Honoria inquired gently. For the tremulous eagerness

of his manner and the joyfulness of his greeting filled her with a sad sympathetic pain.

"The doctors say he may get up to-morrow. The Earl sent a London physician who was stopping at a house in the neighbourhood to see him, and—"

"Do you mean papa has been so ill as *that*?" asked the girl.

"He has been very ill, very ill indeed; but the worst is now over. All he needs now is nourishment and good nursing, both of which he has."

"Poor mamma!" sighed Honie; "what a time it must have been for her, and I away!"

"And you away!" repeated her companion, "we have all missed you sadly. Are you a little bit glad to be home again?"

"I am very glad!" she answered, but her tone was so quiet and subdued that Mr. Warren scarcely knew how to accept her assurance.

"Have you enjoyed yourself?" he inquired, giving Belgium his head and letting him tear along the level road at his own sweet pace.

"Greatly," said Honoria, but there was no joy in her tone.

"Are you quite well, Honie?" he added. "I cannot see your face in this light, but I fancied at the station you looked somewhat thinner and paler than when you went away."

"I am quite well!" was the reply, "but I am tired, and of course hearing about papa being ill—"

She broke off in the middle of her sentence, and Mr. Warren knew it was to hide the sound of tears.

"I wanted your mother to let me fetch you a week since," he said, "but she was reluctant to spoil your holiday. Every one has been anxious to show her kindness, and express sympathy, but I do not think any person has really proved so useful as Mrs. Caruth. I declare I had not the faintest idea a lady of her tastes could possess such a genius for cookery."

"Has she made little things for papa?" asked Honoria with interest; but Mr. Warren could

feel the interest was for her father, and not for Mrs. Caruth.

"Wonderful things, and brought them over herself, without a bit of fuss or nonsense. I have said and thought some very hard things of Mrs. Caruth, but I recall them all now. I believe her to be a very good woman."

"Although she does sing like an angel?" supplemented Honoria.

"Although she sings like an actress," amended Mr. Warren. "No, I shall never think otherwise than kindly of Mrs. Caruth, after seeing her consideration for your mother. But is it not strange that she never will sit down at the cottage. She always says she is busy, or has letters to write, or something."

"Mrs. Caruth is a very singular person," said Honoria thoughtfully, "there must be a story in her life somewhere."

"Why, Honie, how wise you have grown!" exclaimed Mr. Warren; "you talk of life as if you know all about it."

"I do not think I know much about it!" answered the girl, "but I am beginning to learn."

"I never want you to know more," he remarked, to which she replied,

"No one can stand still. We must always go on learning."

"Does not Solomon say something about 'he who increaseth his knowledge increaseth his sorrow also'?" asked Mr. Warren.

"Very likely, and if he says so, most probably he is right."

Mr. Warren turned his head to look more closely at Honoria, but again the darkness foiled him.

"Did you sing much at Dilfield?" he asked, the question being almost naturally suggested by the mention of Mrs. Caruth's name.

"Scarcely at all; Mrs. Lessant did not care to hear me."

"How very odd!" exclaimed Mr. Warren, with delightful inconsistency.

"Do you think so?" said Honoria, and she laughed.

It was the first evidence of amusement Mr. Warren had noticed, and yet he did not care for that little rippling laugh; so different from the hearty merriment he could remember. Something in the sound of her voice—something in her manner, touched and affected him strangely. She was not the same Honie who had left Antlet, only when the strawberries were ripe, and who was returning while peaches still glowed on the walls of the old-fashioned garden at Antlet Farm.

In some premature fashion she had changed from the crude Honoria, he remembered, ah! so well, into a more gracious and graceful, into a tenderer and softened specimen of femininity. He had always loved her, loved her as child and girl, but now he felt a flutter at his heart such as had never agitated it before, when he realized that this strange and unwonted Honoria held everything he possessed in the way of affection; that it was in the power of this girl to make him happy or miserable, as he thought, for life.

Driving on through the gathering darkness, he recalled some words Mrs. Caruth had very earnestly spoken to him one day on the beach.

"If you can make Honoria Legerton love you, she will prove the very most devoted wife, spite of the disparity in your years, any man ever married; but if you cannot, say 'Good-bye and God bless you,' for she is not one atom like her mother. Honoria would drag at the chain till she broke your heart or her own."

Could he make her love him? Mr. Warren meant to try.

Full of which idea he said in answer to her question, "I think the person who does not like your singing as singing, must be strangely constituted."

"Then Mrs. Lessant is strangely constituted," observed Honoria; and again Mr. Warren noticed her voice was full of sadness. Thinking of the summer's morning when she left her home with her father full of health and spirits, she grew sick when she looked at Belgium through the darkness, and remembered he was driven by a

stranger. That was one of the things Mr. Legerton had always been particular concerning. Let a man be ever so good a whip, he hated to see the animal he usually drove handled by any one except himself.

Utterly depressed as Honoria felt, it seemed to her that already her father was dead and another occupying his place. She had on her that strange sense of prevision, which only very young persons ever possess.

When people have gone through sorrow, and experienced adversity, it is natural for them to expect both, but the sensation which often comes to boys and girls in their teens that life will be troubled, is surely a merciful inspiration of nature which prepares them in some degree for the inevitable evil to come.

"There is the cottage, Honie!" said Mr. Warren, pointing with his whip to a light in the distance.

"Dear old cottage!" exclaimed Honoria, and once more Mr. Warren turned towards her in the darkness, and tried to see her face.

Vaguely perhaps he understood a great change must have been wrought in Honie's nature when she could say something in answer to nothing.

"How surprised your mother will be to see you!" he remarked flicking Belgium, who spite of his progress towards home was beginning to flag.

"I do not think she will!" said Honie.

And Honie was right, for as they drew up at the gate of Antlet Cottage, Mrs. Legerton's voice rang clear through the night air,

"Have you brought Honie, Mr. Warren?"

"Here I am, mamma," cried Honie, and next moment mother and daughter were clasped heart to heart.

"My child!"

"Dear, dear mother!" that was all the verbal greeting, and yet it proved more than enough.

"You see I was right, Mrs. Legerton?" said Mr. Warren entering the drawing-room a few minutes later.

"Yes. How can I ever thank you sufficiently for your kindness in going over to Ripley?"

"By making our young lady go to bed at once!" he answered, and to Honie as she shook hands with him there seemed something good and reassuring, and terribly pathetic, in his honest sunburnt face.

"If you please, Miss Honie—" and here Nannie appeared wiping her hands on her apron in expectation of the greeting she knew "Miss Honie" would accord—"If you please, Miss Honie, the master is calling out for you."

"I am coming, papa, I am coming!" cried Honie, running upstairs as fast as her young swift feet could carry her.

He was lying propped up with pillows and looking like death itself.

"Have you indeed come back, my child?" he said. "Honie, you must never leave your mother again."

"I never will, papa!" she said. To an outsider the way in which Mr. Legerton made over all his duties to some one else, willing to undertake them, could not be considered as otherwise than remarkable.

CHAPTER XVI.

CLARA'S LETTER.

SUMMER was quite over, and the autumn days were come. The woods at Antlet were masses of glorious colour, red and yellow and russet green, with here and there a copper beech or the glowing berries of the mountain ash, breaking the gorgeous monotony of the leaves' expiring tints.

On the shore the waves still washed a little angrily, for the equinoctial gales had been late that autumn, and the sea had not as yet recovered its equanimity. Nevertheless it was over a beautiful and peaceful landscape Honoria's eyes wandered as she stood looking over the sea one day, nearly six weeks after her return from Dilfield.

How had those weeks been spent? To a casual observer, well and busily in attendance upon her sick father, in little household cares that relieved Mrs. Legerton and Nannie from some part of the burden of work both were only too willing to undertake, in rapid walks to Frodsham for medicine or some small dainty the invalid's fickle fancy suggested would be palatable, in seeing visitors who now came far too often to the cottage for some serious reason not to be underlying their kindly sympathy, and sometimes, though rarely, in a lonely stroll on the sea-shore, or as low lingering saunter in the moonlight over the Antlet cliffs.

Yes, and further, three or four times a week, whenever, in the early morning or just at twilight, she could best absent herself from the cottage, she would run over to Mrs. Caruth's and take the hour's practise and teaching she had abandoned when she first returned home.

"I do not seem to care about singing now," she said to Mrs. Caruth, in answer to a question as to when she meant to resume her studies.

"I fancy Mrs. Lessant put an extinguisher on my vanity."

"You ought not to lose any more time," was Mrs. Caruth's practical commentary on this statement. "Your holiday has been quite long enough, and just because you have sung so little while at Dilfield, you must sing all the more at Antlet."

"But I can be so ill spared from home," urged the girl.

"Ah! Honie, that won't do with me. I am too old a woman of the world not to understand how minutes can be economized. Put your now wasted minutes into a money box, and devote the result to me. With management we can get through a considerable amount of work even in a short time; and to put the matter in plain English, Miss Honoria Legerton, you must give that short time to music. Some day you will thank me for being so peremptory an instructor."

Thus it came about that Honie resumed her singing lessons: but Mrs. Caruth's quick ear de-

tected the difference in her voice, and she sat down and meditated over the matter.

"Honie," she said at last, "what has happened to you while you have been away?"

"Nothing!" answered the girl guiltily.

"Well, well," observed Mrs. Caruth, with cheerful incredulity, "nothing it shall be, if you please to give it that name. All I can say is:

'In thy voice there thrills a tone,
Never to thy childhood known.'"

"I am not a child any longer," observed Honoria.

"No, my dear, and I dare say others besides you and me have found out that little secret. However, I do not want to elicit an unwilling confidence. All I do want to say is, you must now practise more diligently than ever."

"Have I gone back, then?" asked Honoria.

"I did not say you had. I simply remarked you must work harder than ever."

"Why?"

"I will tell you some day."

"Some day soon?"

"Possibly; meantime you will trust me, and follow my advice blindly."

"If I can!" agreed Honie, and thus it happened that she so frequently sped over the cliff, and down the hillside, to a certain nook, where perched on a grassy knoll at the head of a deep unsuspected bay Mrs. Caruth's house stood sheltered from the storms that sometimes shook Antlet Cottage to its foundations.

Often, though, she found it difficult to refrain from throwing up her musical studies in despair. She had lost the singleness of heart and oneness of purpose which gives to youth the impetus that carries its genius, spite of failure after failure, onward to success. While the tones of her voice floated through the air, her thoughts were always flitting back to the soft luxurious life at Elm Vale. Time had been when the appointments of Mrs. Caruth's modest home seemed to her perfect; but that time was before she had eaten of the tree of knowledge, the fruit of which, sooner or later, is presented for the delectation of every one born of woman.

And as regarded that little love matter, what then—why, she had received one letter and answered it, better, perhaps, than she could have done verbally.

Instinctively, perhaps, but still certainly, she felt Mr. Carder was trying to throw the onus and the difficulty and the decision upon her. If she bid him come he would come; if she only said the word he would be with her, but Honie did not say the word. Very decidedly she told him he must not write to her again.

“I have never before kept anything secret from my mother,” she went on, “and yet I cannot grieve her by speaking about you. She would be so vexed if she knew what you have said to me—vexed and hurt—and there is trouble enough in the house already without my adding to it.”

It was a slightly irritable letter, and although she begged him to forgive her if what she had said seemed unkind, still, perhaps, he felt it to be so; at all events, he never wrote again. She had expected him to write or come, but it was

only when the days and the weeks went by, and he continued to make no sign, that Honoria knew how thoroughly she once believed in his professions of attachment; how she had clung to the faith of his utter affection and soothed her self-love with it.

And now, he did not even give "one prop on which to stay her pride." She had let herself care for a man who, almost the moment she was out of his sight, drifted back to his old allegiance.

She had given the first love of her young heart at one bound to another, and he knew it, and had encouraged the sweet insanity for his own amusement, and then when she was gone turned back, not unwillingly, to the serious business and purpose of his life.

Something of this sort of bitterness took up its abode in the girl's mind, and saved her, perhaps, from utter misery; for though hearts may break with grief, they never do with anger, and Honoria's heart was angry enough with Mr. Carder through all the first glory of that

autumn in which the whole current of her life was changed.

By the time she understood the turn events had taken she was prepared, after a fashion, for the certainty that Arthur Carder would never come to Antlet.

This certainty it was which she stood mentally contemplating whilst her outward vision ranged wearily from sea to cliff, from cliff to fields and trees, and all the fair country lying inland. In her hand she held an open letter written by her only correspondent at Dilfield.

"You will be surprised to hear that after all Trixy is to be married next month. The great powers have decided that, as the affair must take place, the sooner all the fuss is over the better; and, my dear, *what do you think?* If you made five hundred guesses, you would never guess the truth. *I am to be married on the same day.* There has been a terrible domestic storm, to which has succeeded an unnatural domestic calm. Mamma is 'reconciled,' so she says, to one of her daughters marrying a mere

nobody. For some reason all her wrath seems now directed against you. I will not repeat all the pretty speeches she makes anent hypocrisy, ingratitude, and so forth, but clearly you are down in her very blackest books; for which reason I dare not even suggest the eternal fitness there would be in having you for one of my bride's-maids. By the bye, what is the meaning of the story mamma has got hold of concerning *your* being engaged, and if so, to whom, and what is he? Mamma told Arthur your *fiancé* was an 'eminently suitable person in every respect.' So I conclude, if there be a word of truth in the matter, you have met with some horribly prosaic individual and promised to marry him merely to vary the monotony of your existence—casting out Satan with Beelzebub. What a sly little puss you must be—why, I should as soon have suspected a baby in arms of even thinking of a lover as you! It is only another proof of the fact that still waters flow deep—with 'etcetera, etcetera.' Doubtless you know the end of that proverb; if not, you can

ask your 'young man' to enlighten you. By the bye, he is not young, is he—"

Honie read no further; her hand dropped to her side, and she lifted her poor white face with an instinctive feeling that she must meet her sorrow bravely.

She left the letter on the table for her mother to read, and went out for a rapid walk to Frodsham.

All the day long she was feverishly active, restlessly industrious; and only when night, quiet and peaceful, came, did she break down, and stand out in the moonlight to fight her trouble alone.

Only two months before, only two, she had stood in the rose-garden at Elm Vale, listening to her first love tale told by a man who had no right to love her at all, and still less right to whisper such a story to the girl, who, having unconsciously learnt to care for him, might never but for his selfish folly have interpreted the stirrings of her heart.

Down, in a worldless tearless agony, the girl

looked at the placid sea, where the moonbeams were flickering and dancing, and just one single vessel showed its sails gleaming white in the clear yet mystic light. Ah! what was such a scene and hour to Honie now? She had eaten of the fruit, and for ever after she should never look with just the same eyes, as she had done in her calm beautiful girlhood, on land and water, on tree and hill and plain.

Over the gravelled walk came a swift light step, which though the girl heard, her heart was too full to permit her to turn and greet.

For a minute, silence, whilst Mrs. Legerton, standing beside her daughter, let her eyes wander likewise over the beautiful expanse of sea, which had, almost unknown to herself, comforted her in many an hour of weariness and distress; then, softly laying her hand on Honie's shoulder, she asked, "Is there anything my child wants to tell her mother?"

"There is nothing your child can tell her mother," was Honie's answer.

Yet another silence, which lasted about as

long as one could count twenty; and then Mrs. Legerton, feeling that love and faith could never depart, no matter what confidence might be withheld, said,

"I do not ask you, darling, what has occurred. It is enough for me to be sure you have done right."

"I have tried to do right," answered Honoria with a quivering sigh; "but, oh! mamma, mamma!"

And as in the days when she was an infant, she had laid her face on her mother's bosom and there found solace for every woe; so the girl locked in her mother's arms felt some of the bitterness drawn from her heart-wound, and a virtue of healing infused into her soul.

CHAPTER XVII.

HONORIA DECLINES THE HONOUR.

FROM that night Honoria bore the trouble better. Outwardly, so far, that is, as face and manner were concerned, there was little difference to be discerned; but those who knew Honoria Leger-ton best—her mother and Mrs. Caruth—understood that the evil spirit had been exorcised, and that to the trouble, whatever it might be, which for a time threatened to stultify her energies, the girl did not mean to succumb.

Rather—though there were hours dark and sorrowful with the trouble of which no one meddled—Honoria's life was a better and more active one than it had ever proved before. Who so willing and intelligent a nurse? who so speedy a messenger? who so thoughtful for

the little wants and small needs of others? who so tender? ay, and beyond all, who so industrious as well?

What, though there was a white earnest look about her face which told she knew at last of the certain trouble to come, do you think her voice often faltered over her lessons, her hand refused its office when writing what her genius found to do, in that room whence Mr. Legerton had called her when she started on her first journey into the world?

To youth having genius and energy, it is given to do mental feats in perfect unconsciousness of any wonderful result being compassed, which age and middle age may achieve indeed, but not without weariness of spirit and exhaustion of body.

Wherefore, young man, whilst you are still in the spring of your existence, work hard, for the work will be pleasant to you; and gather what roses you may then, because their perfume will be grateful to you.

The day must come, believe me—let the bio-

graphies of celebrated men and women tell you what story they like—when all work will seem hateful, and the scent of all roses such as men gather, loathsome.

But upon the mind of Honoria Legerton work had not yet palled; and there still seemed perfume in the far-away roses.

A purpose had been given to her labour, which hitherto labour had lacked. At length she understood that not merely was it her pleasure, but also her duty, to use the gift God had given her to the uttermost, instead of burying it in a napkin.

Never again might music be to her exactly what it had been in the past, but it might be almost more; a means of support for her mother when—ah! that weary, weary when—the possibility of which was now so apparent to every one who looked in Mr. Legerton's wasted face.

No more for him the long stretching ride across country; there were plenty of birds that autumn in the stubble, but he knew that he should never bring down one again—never; nor

whip the trout-streams, nor cross the dewy meadows in the early summer mornings, nor ever handle an oar, nor set a sail, nor drive Belgium, nor sit at great men's tables, nor be considered the soul of all good company.

Hitherto life to him had seemed a not bad comedy; but now the tragedy was at hand, and to do Mr. Legerton justice, he turned as brave a face to the last as he ever turned a pleasant face to the first.

"It is of no use trying to tinker me up again, Marion," he said to his wife; "not all the doctors in the kingdom could mend such a broken pitcher as I am. It is strange too, for never a Legerton that I ever heard of died under sixty, unless he was drowned, or killed fighting, or broke his neck hunting. Still, dear, it's coming, and Death is a visitor to whom we can scarcely deny ourselves. What! crying, Marion? I am not worth a single tear. Looking back on my life, I know I have not made you as happy as I might, though, upon my soul, dear, I have made you as happy as I could. We cannot

alter our natures, can we? and I always liked to leave care behind me; still, if you had married some other fellow, he would have done better for you."

"Don't, love, don't, I cannot bear it," entreated his wife.

"Well, I won't then," said the sick man cheerfully, "and besides, you have Honie. She has made up for a good deal, has not she? And you will have money enough to live on for a while, and then she will marry Warren, and he will never desert you, Marion, I know that; whilst, as for Honie, twenty husbands could not separate her from her mother; eh, Marion?"

"No, dear, nothing can ever separate me and Honie; but now do try to go to sleep."

"I should feel very miserable about you both if it were not for Warren," persisted the dying man.

"He has been a kind friend to us always," said Mrs. Legerton with loving evasion, for she could not find it in her heart to tell her husband that all was over between Honie and the

owner of Antlet Farm, and she had entreated Mr. Warren to keep the secret also.

"Indeed I will, Mrs. Legerton," he answered, "and all the more readily because I fancy Honie will think better of the matter some day. It strikes me that I spoke a little too soon."

"I think you did," agreed Honie's mother, but she did not add her conviction that his precipitancy could never be remedied.

As was the man's wont, when tact might have saved him, he lost all chance of gaining what he wanted for lack of it.

Honie had been over one evening at Antlet Farm for new-laid eggs.

These articles were the perquisites of Miss Warren, and having duly paid for and received them, the girl was hastening home through the gathering twilight when Mr. Warren met her.

"In a hurry as usual," he remarked.

"I did not leave home until nearly dark," she answered.

"Are you in too great a hurry to waste a few minutes on me?" he asked.

No; Honoria did not think she was in so great a hurry as all that came to. She had lost all fear of Mr. Warren—all dread of any possible *tête-à-tête*. He might say what he pleased to her now, and she knew what she must answer.

Slowly they paced onward, side by side, at first in utter silence, which at length Mr. Warren broke by saying,

“Honie, I want to speak to you about your father.”

She did not answer, so he went on: “You must see that he is very ill. I do not want to distress you more than I can help, but he grows weaker every day.”

“I am afraid he does.”

“I do not think the doctors give much hope.”

Honoria swallowed something which seemed threatening to choke her, but answered never a word.

“I would give anything I have to save him for you, Honie.”

“I believe you would, Mr. Warren.” He was

not a generous man as the world understands generosity, but, nevertheless, what Honie said was true. She did believe him.

"Still you know these things are not with us; and if—if—Honorina, the worst should come to pass, I do think it would be a great comfort to your father to know you would be taken care of."

"I shall be taken care of," she answered.

"You do not exactly understand what I mean, dear. What would comfort your father most now, would be to see you married and beyond the power of all uncertainty."

"Married!" repeated Honorina, with an astonishment too mighty for many words. "Married!"

"You know, Honie, I have always cared for you. Young as you are, it seems to me years and years since I first began to think of you as my little wife. The day you left the hall I carried you up the hill to the cottage, and you fell asleep in my arms that night. You were the sweetest child! ay, my dear, far and away a sweeter child than you have ever been a girl

till just lately, but now it seems to me as if the angel of long ago had come back again and dwelt with you."

She did not answer. Of what was she thinking—ah! rather, of what was she not thinking—of the long, long, long ago, as time counts in a very young life—of the intervening years—of that night in the rose-garden at Elm Vale—of the approaching sorrow of her suitor close at hand? Never for one moment did she think of accepting him, but her heart was softened and tender, though it could not give one throb of affection in answer to his.

"It must cost your father many an anxious hour to consider how you are to live if he does not recover; that is, he would be anxious if he did not know that I will try to smooth every difficulty. I have thought the matter over and over, till I am tired of thinking, and it seems to me the only way out of our difficulty is that you should marry me at once, and so give me the right to stand between you and trouble, should the trouble come."

"Marry, and my father ill!" said Honie, repeating her admirer's suggestion over again with the profoundest amazement. Of what men in their selfishness might suggest Dilfield had given her an idea; but what this man proposed, out of what he would have been pleased to call unselfishness, fairly astounded her.

Marry while any one in the house lay ill and perhaps dying! Marry, or think of marrying, with her father sick and feeble, and failing day by day! Honie's cheeks flushed up to a more vivid scarlet than they had done the day she reached Dilfield, at the bare idea of her suitor imagining she could do such a thing.

No; not if she loved him as much as—well—as much as she did not. No, not if the man her own heart approved were free and pleading his cause, could Honoria have been so disloyal to her training and her antecedents as even to listen patiently to such a monstrous suggestion.

There may be cases in which marriages contracted under circumstances of sorrow and

anxiety may prove happy enough, but the heart must have grown very old before a woman can voluntarily relinquish all the joyful hope that should walk hand in hand with her to the altar, and enter sad-faced into the new estate which ought to be strewn with flowers, and look its very fairest when a willing bride comes to take possession.

Although she had suffered cruelly, more, perhaps, than she herself realized till after many a weary year—life's beauty and promise were not ended for Honoria. Winter was at hand for her; not so dark a winter, it is true, as some which were to follow; and already, at times, she shivered, in anticipation of the frosts and snows—the chill winds and the driving rain which she felt were coming; but still, unconsciously, it is true, yet certainly, in her heart there lay faith in a spring beyond—in a time when the budding flowers should struggle through the lately frozen earth, and the birds sing cheerily upon boughs already clothed with a dreamlike mist of green.

How should a man like Mr. Warren understand all this? How should he who had never known the youth of imagination and fitful vagary and boundless possibility, who had always been practical and prosaic from his teens upwards, comprehend the workings of a sensitive and refined and, beyond all, artistic nature?

Had she married him Honoria must have been one of the most wretched of wives, not from any absolute unkindness he could with his own knowledge have practised towards a woman, but from sheer lack of comprehension.

It is this want which makes one rank detest another, which causes one woman to say of her fellow-woman,

“My dear, there is *nothing* in her—what men can see baffles me”; which induces men to remark, “He is a poor fellow. To what market he ever proposes taking those notions I really cannot imagine!”

There are two things it seems to me most human beings are devoid of. A sense of humour and the slightest imagination. If men and women

could cultivate either or both of these modest plants, life, I fancy, would prove more endurable than it usually is. Since, look you, a sense of humour can take the sharpness out of more things than it would please wasps to believe, while imagination can create for its possessor visions of greatness and love and fame and beauty, beside which the best realities of life are tame and colourless.

In her modest room at Antlet, in her eyrie overlooking the sea, dreams had visited the girl in her waking moments so perfect and complete, that no empress was ever for the time being so fully satisfied, so utterly content as she; but now the time of dreams was over, and she was listening to her second love tale, told by the wrong narrator.

"If he had been only slightly ill," said Mr. Warren, answering Honoria's remark about her father, "I should not have spoken yet."

"Please, do not speak; oh! please, do not," she answered, panting a little as if she had been walking up hill very rapidly.

He laid his hand on her shoulder and stopped her as she was hurrying on.

"Why," he asked, "should I not speak, why should I postpone what you must know I have wanted to say for months and months? Honie, I love you. I have always loved you. Six months ago I thought you could be no dearer to me than you were then, but you are. My love for you increases day by day, and hour by hour."

"Don't, Mr. Warren. If you only knew how sorry I am, you would not grieve me by saying any more."

"But, dear, consider, *nothing* could benefit your father so much as to know your future was assured. If he lived he would rejoice to know you were married to a man able to shelter you from all the storms of life, and if—"

"Whether my father lives or dies I cannot marry you!"

She was not panting now, the hand he had taken lay in his cold and still—too cold, too still by far, as he vaguely understood. She

stood at last at bay. She had faced him while positive. She had looked at probability as well as possibility, and spoken the word she had been afraid previously to utter even in her thoughts.

"Do you not care for me at all?" he asked.

"I do care for you very much," she said softening again. "I shall always feel you have been the kindest of friends, and the best; but I cannot marry you, Mr. Warren. I would if I could, indeed, you may believe me, but I cannot."

"Will you tell me why?"

She had struck his self-esteem a crushing blow at last, and carried conviction to his mind; for both of which reasons his tone was sad and almost humble as he put his question.

For a moment she hesitated, then she said impulsively,

"I *will* tell you. I have seen some one else that—"

"Not that you like better! Honie, don't say it; my dear, it is my life I have put into your hands, to make much of or to ruin."

"I hope not" she answered. "I hope caring for the wrong person cannot utterly spoil a whole life!"

"What do you mean? have you—"

"Two wrong persons have cared for me if you do," she said softly. "At least I thought—I supposed—"

"*He* did *not* care for you, Honie. Whoever he may have been, if he had cared for you he could not have given you up. Fancy my forgetting you! fancy my letting weeks and months pass away without seeing you! do you think it reasonable, do you think it possible? We are all alone here, and not a word you have told me to-night shall ever pass my lips again, so you need not mind speaking frankly. Do you think he loved you as I do?"

Perfectly clear and distinct her answer; but it was not the Honie he remembered that spoke; but rather an entirely different Honoria who said,

"I do not; but I know—"

"That you loved him," said Mr. Warren bitterly as she stopped suddenly.

She did not answer. Away and away through the gathering darkness, she was looking with wistful eyes back at that night when she had been so happy and so wretched, when she had first begun to learn something about life, when the brook began to merge into the river, and the stream of her life to quicken and quicken till the old still flow became a thing utterly of the past—a thing to be recalled only in memory—because it was dead and gone, dead as the rose-blossoms in Miss Carder's garden.

"Did you care for him very much, Honie?" asked her companion eagerly, jealously, and yet with a certain rough sympathy in his tone. "Did you, dear?"

"I am afraid so. Yes, I am sure I did," she answered with a long gasping sigh. "Do not let us talk about it, please, any more. It was so long ago. So long."

What might not those words have told to a suitor of another stamp; what man of intelligence but would have caught that heart on the re-

bound, and held it securely before its owner was conscious of the trick?

Of love's fantasies, however, and of love-making, save in the clumsiest and least romantic fashion, Mr. Warren was as ignorant as any human being well could be. He was not unfeeling, but he utterly lacked all knowledge of those little arts by which a woman's affections can be won. Honest as the day, there was no finesse about him; plain and blunt to a fault, he failed to understand that though love cannot be gained by storm, it may by stratagem, and that the man who plays a waiting game with a woman who does not care for him is he who eventually must win.

Had Mr. Warren waited, how would it have been with him and Honoria, who can tell? He did not wait, and therefore that very evening she refused him point black, with even greater resolution than had characterised her first negative.

All in vain he urged the mental relief it would prove to her father to know her future was

assured. Equally futile were his pleadings in his own behalf; just as well he might have discoursed to a stone.

He did not know how to talk, you see, my reader; if he had, he might have caught and caged a heart which, ere a few short months were ended, must have beaten itself to death against the most thickly gilded wires man ever contrived for captive.

Quite clearly Honoria and her mother were cast in different moulds. Mrs. Legerton belonged to the enduring and suffering order of women—her daughter to the working and struggling.

“Think of your mother, Honie, think of her.” This was Mr. Warren’s last shot, and aimed with intention straight home. “You know what she is—how terrible it would be for her to leave the Cottage, at her time of life to miss even the few comforts to which she has been accustomed. Think of her in poor lodgings, lacking, perhaps, the ordinary necessities of existence; think that it rests with you whether she shall spend the

remainder of her days in comparative luxury, or leave the home to which she has become attached, in order to make as great a step down in the social scale as that she had to take when she left Antlet Hall and went to Antlet Cottage."

At that point Honoria turned. The devil of pride, so often rampant within her, so often subdued by a kindly look or a tender word, was let loose by his own stupidity, and the girl spoke out.

"Mr. Warren," she said, and her voice was as cutting as an east wind, "I will work my fingers to the bone for my mother if need be, but I will not marry for her. If I did, I should make her more miserable than she has ever been yet; and I am beginning to understand," added Honie, with a little tremour in her tone, "that she has not always stood in the sunshine. As for comforts and luxuries, *you* should know how little she cares for either; and when you talk of descending in the social scale, I really do not understand what you mean. I know my mother

would be a gentlewoman if she were dressed in a hailstorm print gown and lived in a hut, and that is all I care to know. There may be people, and I dare say there are, who think money can do everything, but I never heard of it being able to purchase good-breeding or a grandfather."

"Don't be angry, Honie."

"I cannot help being angry, Mr. Warren. What right have you or any one to speak of my mother as if she were less a lady at the Cottage than at the Hall?"

"You mistook my meaning, dear. I was not speaking of what *I* thought of money, but of the world's opinion concerning it."

"How can you know anything about the world's opinion? It must be a very stupid world, indeed, if the idea ever could come into its mind that it was possible for my mother to be ever other than what she is."

"My child, how *am* I to explain myself?" said Mr. Warren, in despair.

"I do not think you can explain yourself,"

retorted Honoria. "We look upon most things differently, I fancy. It was to be expected we should do so; but I ought not to have been angry with you, Mr. Warren," she added, a swift penitence quenching her momentary passion as water extinguishes fire, "for I know you did not mean to vex me, only—only—you must remember, I think my mother superior to any other mother on the face of the whole earth."

"And God knows *so* do I," was the answer. "So high do I hold her, that I ask nothing better than to provide for her whole future, with all love and devotion. Say you will marry me. Oh! Honie, I will be as faithful and tender to her as to you."

"It cannot be," was the girl's reply.

"I shall ask you till it can be."

"I hope not," she answered, and so they parted; he to turn along the road to Frodsham, she to hurry up the hill and arrive panting at the door of the Cottage, where Mrs. Legerton stood awaiting her return.

"I thought you were never coming back,

love," remarked Mrs. Legerton, in her ever gentle voice, underlying which there was just a trace of anxiety.

"So did I," was the answer. "I have been standing for the last half-hour, at the end of the plantation, talking to Mr. Warren."

Mrs. Legerton did not ask a question, but her eyes scanned her daughter's face.

"I said 'No,' mamma," explained Honoria, answering the mute inquiry. "Was I right?"

"If you could not say 'Yes,' decidedly," and Mrs. Legerton led the way into the house, with a sigh which might well have indicated either disappointment or relief.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PLANNING.

IT was all over—had been all over for weeks. In the little drawing-room, looking down upon the sea, Mrs. Legerton sat dressed in her widow's weeds,—pale, heavy-eyed, and thoughtful. In the family vault at Frodsham the last male descendant of the Legertons of Antlet, who might ever claim sepulchre there, lay sleeping dreamlessly, while around the whole countryside commiseration was expressed for that “poor dear creature at the Cottage,” concerning whom the sympathies of society were much exercised, as it could not imagine what was to become of her and her daughter.

At first society had been tolerably easy in its mind, for it understood “sweet, clever Honoria” would eventually marry Mr. Warren.

“A most suitable match,” said elderly ladies whose romantic days, if they ever were romantic, had long been over. “He is a *little* too old, perhaps, but that is a fault on the right side. He is not like a stranger—he has known her all her life. He does not, perhaps, occupy so good a position as he might, but people are sure to call upon *her*; and once that horrid sister of his is away, Mrs. Legerton will put his establishment on a different footing. My husband has met him several times at tenants’ and agricultural dinners, and says he is very fairly presentable, very fairly indeed. Besides, even if he were a little common—and I believe, though destitute of polish, he is not common—undoubtedly it would be a good match for the girl. She is not pretty, though nice-looking; she has not a penny—evidently she failed to do anything for herself when she was staying with her mother’s relations; and then, *poor dear* Mrs. Legerton, how could she, with her sensitive nature, bear to be dependent upon any one she liked and trusted less than the man who has

been so staunch a friend to her husband? I have always understood it was he who got Mr. Legerton the Earl's agency, and I *know* he made Mr. Thomas give him the use of the Cottage for life."

Sydney Smith said, and said truly, that "when A. hears of B. being in distress, his first thought is that C. should do something for him"; and, following out this law of nature, the people in Frodsham and residents round and about Frodsham felt it to be only right that Mr. Warren should marry Honoria and support her mother.

"It is such a comfort," said almost everybody, "to know that matters will be made smooth for poor dear Mrs. Legerton"; and so society, with its mind quite at ease, left cards of inquiry and condolence; and people who came on foot and people who came in carriages crowded to Antlet Cottage to ask how it fared with the widow and the orphan of the deceased Mr. Legerton. People who live either on the edge of, or totally outside, social observances, whose word is a law to themselves, and who recognise

no laws made by others, are somewhat apt to scoff at such tokens of sympathy as Frodsham and neighbourhood proffered to Mrs. Legerton, wherein I think they are wrong.

We cannot live quite alone; and it is impossible in a world God made full of men and women—each individual dependent upon the other for help and encouragement—to feel one has in the awful time of trouble no friend save the Almighty.

To us HE is distant, voiceless—indifferent except by the presence, tones, and help of the earthly agents HE sends.

They are HIS instruments. Ah! how often in times of the direst distress, when relief seemed well-nigh impossible, have I seen a perfectly prosaic person, intent it might be on nothing save his own interests, interpose at some terrible crisis, and regarded as little lower than an angel from God.

Thus Mrs. Legerton, trained in a school which considered such attributes an integral part of the scheme of life, and Honie—born in some

strange fashion a Bohemian—who asked, “Why can't these people stay away?” — both derived comfort from the cards of inquiry and messages of kindly sympathy.

And, indeed, they stood in need of comfort. Had they but realized the forlornness of their position, they would have understood that two people more utterly helpless never before went down into the thick of the battle of life.

“What *will* become of them?” exclaimed society, when it came to hear and believe that Honoria would not marry Mr. Warren. “Why, Mr. Legerton's life was only insured for five hundred pounds, and then he left some debts behind him. They have nothing else; and, after all, what *is* five hundred pounds?”

What, indeed!

Further, Mr. Thomas wished to take possession of the Cottage. “Mrs. Legerton might,” he was good enough to remark, “stay on there for two or three months, but at the end of that time he should like her to leave, as he thought

it would just suit a relation of his own who was an invalid."

"So you see, Mrs. Caruth," observed Mrs. Legerton, "we must now settle on some plan for the future. We want your advice, for it will not do for us to go drifting much longer."

"No," answered Mrs. Caruth thoughtfully, "No." At last she was seated by Mrs. Legerton's hearth and eating bread and salt with that lady; so far, at least, as a cup of sugarless tea could be considered typical of those articles of diet.

"The first thing to do," she went on after a short pause, "is to see exactly how you are situated. Is it quite settled, for instance, that Honie will not marry Mr. Warren?"

"Quite," said Mrs. Legerton. Honie herself made no audible reply, but looked at Mrs. Caruth as one who should say, "Put that idea entirely out of calculation."

"Because, you see," remarked Mrs. Caruth, "if Honie had the slightest intention of recon-

sidering her refusal, it would be superfluous for us to form any plans for the future."

"Honie has not the slightest intention of reconsidering her refusal," said the girl.

"You are certain?"

"I am certain. I do not believe my marrying Mr. Warren would be for mamma's happiness, and I know it could not be for mine."

"Tolerably decided, that, Mrs. Legerton," commented Mrs. Caruth, laughing a little. "Now, the next question is, how are you likely to be situated as regards money?"

"I think, when everything is paid, we shall have nearly five hundred pounds. There was something due to the Earl, but he has written to say he could not think of considering it in the light of a debt. The two horses have been sold at very good prices, and I fancy Mr. Thomas will take the dog-cart. We shall have, I imagine, the insurance money clear, for we owe very little."

"There must have been many expenses connected with so long an illness, however," remarked Mrs. Caruth.

"Ah! no," was the answer. "Every one was so kind, and he required so few luxuries. Besides," Mrs. Legerton added, "I had some money which Mr. Lessant sent by Honoria. It was more than thoughtful of him. He can never understand all the comforts his kindness enabled me to provide for my dear husband."

Honoria rose and kissed her mother as Mrs. Legerton stopped—her voice a little broken by tears she would not shed. Then there was a minute's silence which Mrs. Caruth ended by saying,

"So we may reckon on five hundred pounds and the furniture?"

"And the furniture—yes."

"Well, the sooner Honie sets to work to earn something while you have money in reserve the better. What do you say, Honie?"

"I am ready," answered the girl—"only tell me how I am to earn something, and I will begin at once."

"You must teach," was the reply. "Don't look so grieved, Mrs. Legerton. Your own

good sense long ago whispered something of this to you; other young ladies have taught, and why should not our Honie? At the same time, however, she ought to learn. A voice such as hers ought eventually to bring in a large income, and—"

"I should never like my child to sing in public," interrupted Mrs. Legerton.

"You think so now," said Mrs. Caruth calmly, "but, believe me, the day must come when you will see it is the very best thing your child can do for herself and for you. In this world no one can live without money. A woman may vegetate," Mrs. Legerton winced a little, "or she may struggle; but it is impossible for her to take full and complete enjoyment out of existence if she have constantly to be thinking of ways and means; afraid of spending a shilling; afraid of buying a new ribbon—having scarcely the wherewithal to keep herself healthy and strong, and yet afraid of being ill on account of the expenses illness entails. Pardon me one moment," went on Mrs. Caruth, seeing Mrs. Leger-

ton was about to speak. "Believe me, Honie's is not a temperament to rest satisfied with the inaction of a limited income. From that ordeal you have come forth—sweeter and more gentle, but Honie would not. The rust of enforced idleness would eat into her heart, and in a few years she could not avoid growing peevish and unhappy. God has given her a talent, do not try to make her bury it in a napkin. She will have to work hard for success, but there is a positive pleasure to a young person in hard work."

"It is not the work I mind so much," said Mrs. Legerton, "but the publicity. It has always seemed to me a terrible thing for a lady to be the centre of thousands of eyes—to stand up and be stared at by strangers, and—"

Mrs. Caruth laughed outright. "It is a very terrible idea, no doubt; and yet if you were living at the Hall, and had plenty of money to bring Honie 'out' and present her at Court, perhaps you would not think it a dreadful thing for her to be stared at—rather you would feel mortified if your daughter failed to attract at-

tention. For my own part, I think it is as vulgar an error to suppose a refined woman cannot be an *artiste*, as to say an honest man cannot be a lawyer."

"I am unable to explain my exact meaning," said Mrs. Legerton gently, "but I know, that is, I feel—"

"I know what you feel precisely, Mrs. Legerton," said the other kindly and promptly, "and I will not talk about the matter further than to ask you to remember it is not your own life you have to make or to mar, but Honie's; she will have to get her bread for herself, that is quite clear, and eventually she ought to be able to decide for herself in what way she should like best to earn it. All I say at present is this, let her go on learning; let her cultivate her voice to the utmost, so that hereafter, if she weary of teaching, she can at all events choose whether she will continue to teach or not."

"All I want, mamma," added Honie, "is to make money, and plenty of it, so that we may

be happy together. I do not care in what way I make it, but you may be quite certain I shall not sing in public if you object to my doing so; I will teach, and there are my songs, you know."

"Yes, there are your songs, dear," agreed Mrs. Legerton, brightening up a little.

"Yes, there are your songs," repeated Mrs. Caruth.

"Why do you smile?" asked Honoria; "are they so very bad?"

"They are not bad at all," was the answer; "on the contrary—but, my dear child, you must put them out of your reckoning altogether. At the end of five years you may count yourself fortunate, if you can get two guineas for the best ballad you ever wrote."

"So I should count myself," said the girl. "I could write a song in an evening, and if I only got ten shillings for each, why, that would be three pounds a week. One hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"One hundred and fifty-six, to be perfectly

accurate," corrected Mrs. Caruth; then with a comical look of despair, she turned to Mrs. Legerton and said, "They are all alike, these young people. They know nothing of the world, and they will not listen to words of wisdom from those who do. To them all things seem possible, even selling a song every day in the week. Listen to the project of your daughter. She designs to write over three hundred ballads a year, and to find a publisher for them. Verily, the faith of babes and sucklings is astonishing."

"But other people get songs published—why should not I?" persisted Honie.

"Why not, indeed? Even I, Honie, have got songs published, but not soon enough—ah! no. What you must do now, dear," she went on hurriedly, and putting the dead past bravely behind her, "is to make up your mind to teach, and to learn to teach what you know to those more ignorant than yourself, and to learn what you do not know from some one qualified to instruct you. Now, how are these two essentials

to be compassed? We want your help, Mrs. Legerton."

"You do not wish me to part with Honie, surely?" said the poor lady in such grievous alarm that Mrs. Caruth at once hastened to set her mind at ease on this point.

"No," she said. "Honie must never leave her mother. What I want is your help in discovering how Honie is to teach others and at the same time improve herself. She is quite competent to teach. The great difficulties in the matter are, first, where are the pupils to be got; and second, where is the competent instructor to be found."

"I fear there would not be many pupils in Frodsham," answered Mrs. Legerton.

"I am sure there would not," argued Mrs. Caruth; "and besides, you remember that a prophet is not without honour save in his own country and amongst his own people. But why should you stay in this neighbourhood? What tie have you now to this place rather than to any other place in the world? Mr. Thomas,

you say, wants your cottage, and I suppose he must have it. Why, therefore, not make a decided move at once, and take the step now you must take some time? Go to London; that is the only chance for Honie; leave this sweet sleepy place and let her see the world. My advice is—go to London—and go soon—”

“To London!” cried Honie in an ecstasy.

“To London!” repeated Mrs. Legerton, and she looked around the room where she had spent so many years of her life like a “dreamer in a dream.”

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. LITCHFOLD WONDERS.

NEARLY three years later on, Antlet, with its glory of sunshine lying over land and sea, with its grey December skies frowning sullenly down on leafless trees and storm-tossed vessels, with its furious gales that lashed the billows to madness, was to Honoria Legerton a mere memory.

The track up the hillside was scarcely so clear as formerly; recollection had sometimes to busy itself to remember each unimportant landmark on the road to Frodsham, and even the laburnums and the lilacs, the thorns and the great elder-trees at Antlet Farm changed their positions, and began to play strange pranks of hide-and-seek with her, to whom the place of each one of them had been familiar from childhood.

A wet evening in Hackney, a good steady drizzling rain soaking well into the grass growing rank about the old graves in the churchyard—a fine slush of mud in the horse-roads—a greasy slime on the side-paths—people under dripping umbrellas hurrying home—omnibuses filled inside and out with far more than their proper complement of passengers—the gaslights flaring out from shops empty of customers, over pavements alive with drenched and miserable pedestrians—nearer London old stately houses, set well back from the road, frowning darkly upon the stream of life, which never flowed that way when City merchants built themselves great mansions among the then green fields of Hackney, and laid out gardens and planted trees that have now almost disappeared before the advance of speculative builders and tenants clamorous for shoddy houses three inches thick in the walls—cold in winter, hot in summer—which they dignify by the name of “home.”

A very wet evening, and every minute trying to be wetter—not a pleasant evening anywhere,

even in that broad quiet street which leads away from the graveyard into the road turning round towards Homerton, and which, strictly speaking, is in Homerton; and yet past the tower of the old church, along the paved passage between the tombs, and so into Sutton Place, Honoria Legerton, well wrapped up and sheltered under a very gamp of an umbrella, walked rapidly.

"Not a night fit for you to be out," said a kindly male voice, as the speaker opened the door of his house in answer to Honoria's knock. "My dear girl when *will* you begin to take care of yourself?"

"When I have nothing left to take care of," answered Honoria a little penitently; "but I felt so anxious, Mr. Litchfold—cannot you understand?"

"Yes, I can understand," he argued thoughtfully, as he led her into a comfortable room where a fire burnt cheerfully—a room filled with solid old-fashioned furniture—a room the walls of which were covered with prints, whilst a table strewn

with manuscripts in one corner, and a piano littered with music in the other, told that Mr. Litchfold did not strictly confine his attention to one pursuit.

"Sit down," he said, "and have a cup of tea; I had just made it when I heard your step. I will walk home with you after a little. I was going round to your house to-night."

Quite as a matter of course Honoria, without any hesitation, took off her bonnet and shawl, and, drawing close to the fire, stretched out one cold hand towards the blaze, whilst with the other she accepted the offered cup of tea.

"It is all settled," said Mr. Litchfold at last. "I saw him this afternoon."

"When are we to go?" she asked, flushing a little. "To-morrow," was the answer. "His only leisure day before leaving England."

"Where does he live?"

"We are not going to his house. It would be useless, as I want him to hear you in a large room, so I have arranged that we are to meet

him about four o'clock at Mirand's music warehouse, in Waterloo Place."

There was silence for a minute, dead and utter silence, then Honoria said,

"If—if, Mr. Litchfold, my voice should *not* be strong enough?"

"You will be no worse off than you are now," he answered, with an effort at cheerfulness which proved a signal failure. "And you must bear the disappointment bravely."

"I do not care so much about myself," she went on; "but I cannot imagine how mamma would take it."

"She is very anxious?"

"Very. I see she is, I feel she is. At night she does not sleep, in the day-time she is restless."

"Surely a great change has taken place in her sentiments," he remarked. "When you first came to London, if you recollect, she told me distinctly she hoped nothing would ever induce you to sing in public."

"But she did not understand then what teaching really is."

"You find it very hard work, I fear."

"I find it pays very badly," was the answer. "I do not mind the work; but I do mind the smallness of the remuneration."

"And I care for something far more than either. I lament the damage you have done to your voice. You had a beautiful instrument committed to your charge, and you exposed it to the wind and the rain. You allowed the snow to fall on, and easterly gales to play what pranks they pleased with it. You gave it over, practically speaking, to the service of any child whose father could pay a couple of shillings for a lesson, and you know what the result has been. You were within an ace of losing your voice altogether, and it never can be again quite what it was."

"Could I help that, Mr. Litchfold?"

"I think so. Before I had known you a fortnight, I ventured to give you a piece of advice. I told you to live quietly; not to give any lessons; to rest as much as you could; to keep

your mind easy; in a word, to do nothing except mature your voice."

"It is quite true," said Honoria.

"And for more than two years you have been at the beck and call of every vulgar mother, and every snub-nosed child in the parish. You have worked like a horse. I have met you in all weathers, hail, rain, and shine. You have done with as little food as possible. You have gone to bed at night so tired you could not sleep, and you have risen in the morning so weary you could scarcely speak. Your mother entreated you to have mercy on yourself; but you would not. If a holiday came, you employed it in running after publishers, already overstocked with songs. You had one great gift and you despised it. You have spoiled your voice and injured your health for the sake of a few trumpery pounds, which, had you followed my advice, you might have earned, with your voice alone, in a week, long ere this."

"But consider my mother's objections," urged Honoria.

"I did consider them. I said to her, 'Now which is this young lady to be? A teacher or a singer?' *She* answered quite readily, 'a teacher.' I then inquired, 'Why study like a person intending to become a professional?' *You* said brightly that 'knowledge was always useful.' Your reply caused me to imagine there was an amiable division in the camp. Shall I proceed?"

"If you think it necessary, Mr. Litchfold," answered the girl humbly.

"I think it as well to refresh your memory. When I heard you sing, if you remember, I earnestly urged your mother to allow you to devote your whole attention to the cultivation of your voice. I advised you should, if possible, go abroad. I mentioned the name of more than one teacher upon whose thorough knowledge of art and moderation of charge you might thoroughly depend. I went practically into the whole matter of expense; and when I asked you to come to me and hear the result, do you recollect the news you unfolded?"

"Yes; that we had taken a small house and furnished it."

"And when I entreated you to try and let it!"

"I told you what was true; that my mother had not the physical strength nor the mental courage to go into a strange land, among a strange people. I told you I should not ask such a sacrifice, and I implored of you not to ask it either."

"And I did not. I only implored of you, who had then enough physical strength and mental courage to go anywhere, to give up everything, and devote yourself to Art. Do you recollect your answer?"

"I said then, as I should say now, nothing shall ever part me and my mother. If you knew what her life has been, how utterly dependent she is upon me for hope and comfort, you could never think of separating us. I am very young still, I suppose, as years count, Mr. Litchfold; but I am old enough to understand the past and the present are all we can ever hold in our hand; and I cannot tell you, oh! I never could,

how utterly happy I and my mother have been during the more than two years when you wished me to be cultivating my voice away from her. Vaguely, dreamily," added the girl, clasping her slender hands and looking at the flickering firelight as it rose and fell, "I feel life even yet may hold a great deal for me; but I am quite sure it can never develop such a keen sense of pleasure, such a thorough ecstasy of happiness, as I have often felt since I came to London."

"Have you really been happy?" asked Mr. Litchfold, not scornfully nor yet quite incredulously.

"Happy! I should think I have. Of course, I felt dear papa's death dreadfully, horribly; but he died by such slow degrees, we had lived out half the agony of parting before the time came to say good-bye. Oh! my dear father, how well I remember that New Year's Eve when—when—before the New Year dawned—I had no father—living."

Just a moment's silence, which her host did not break, and then she proceeded,

"I was young, Mr. Litchfold, and it may seem unfeeling; but after we came to London, there were hours and days when I quite forgot all our trouble, and mamma helped me to forget. Though papa, I know, is never out of her thoughts, she does not talk of him and will not let me talk of him. I hope, I do hope, it is not wrong to say so; but papa never was to me just the same as mamma. He had to be so much away, and she and I were always so much together."

"Go on, my dear, I understand," said the grey-haired gentleman opposite.

"Well, then, we were thrown quite together, my mother and I. We had to leave the dear old cottage and come to London; and, somehow or another, my heart has seemed to beat to a livelier tune since I have been always amongst men and women. Even the little street Arabs hereabouts like me a tiny bit, I think; at any rate, they touch their hats and laugh at me. To come back, Mr. Litchfold, voice or no voice,

one can but be happy; and I have been very, very, very happy since I came to London."

"Spite the mud and the fog, the heat and the dust?"

"Despite everything," answered the girl earnestly. „I am but a poor simpleton, I suppose; but the great heart of London has seemed to throb in answer to my heart. As a small clock keeps time, if not tune, to the utterances of some mighty clock near at hand, my life since I left Antlet has sometimes, I suppose, been a little hard, as people account hardness, but I have *loved* it, Mr. Litchfold. I shall never be so happy again. I have not cared for the wind or the rain, or the heat or the dust. If the snow were on the ground, the bright firelight at home was doubly welcome. In August I came back to a cool shaded room, full of the scent of flowers. And people have been very kind to me—very, very kind. I believe mothers are sometimes hard on governesses, but no one has been hard on me. Rather my trouble is to escape from hospitality. I need scarcely ever

take a meal at home, if I chose to allow my employers to board me."

"You turn a bright face to the world, child," was the answer, "and the world puts on its brightest face in return. Thackeray says the world is a looking-glass, and he is right."

"It must be hard though," said Honoria, "to feel bright always."

"Not so long as one has hope," was the reply. "It is when the power to expect is gone, and the possibility of enjoyment is, or seems to be, dead—when, though the lips may smile, the heart is sad—that the difficulty of presenting a cheerful countenance begins."

"Still, kind as people are, I am not satisfied," said Honoria, reverting to the original topic of conversation. "I see our money dwindling away, and I cannot sometimes help asking myself what would happen if either of us were to have a long illness; when mamma had that attack of influenza, and I followed suit with bronchitis, I was obliged to consider our position very seriously."

"When you had that attack of bronchitis, I think it was high time for you to consider it," remarked Mr. Litchfold dryly.

"I do not, however, regret the two years I have spent in teaching," she went on. "I have learnt a great deal in the time, and besides, mamma has outlived her prejudices. I could never have been happy as a public singer, had she not approved of my becoming one—my own judgment has long told me it was the only good road for me to travel, but I would never have travelled it against her consent."

"Let us hope her consent has not come a little too late."

"Oh! Mr. Litchfold, you are *afraid*," cried Honoria.

"I am *not* afraid," he answered, "and have every faith that with care and rest your voice may yet be perfectly restored. Nevertheless, I cannot but feel anxious; it is impossible to say how long a time may elapse before it would be safe for you to sing to a large audience, and in the meantime, my dear, if you persist in

running about in all weathers—in denying yourself things which to a woman who wishes to become an *artiste*, are absolute necessities—in working hard and sleeping little, I would not when the time of probation has expired give that for your chance of success,” and Mr. Litchfold snapped his fingers, not derisively, or tauntingly, but in a very access of mortified disappointment.

Then Honoria rose and laid her hand on his arm.

“Mr. Litchfold,” she said, “hitherto I have not followed your advice, because what I did seemed to me the right thing to do. I was unyielding, not because of any great pleasure I found in taking my own way, but because I firmly believed it was the best, and that you did not quite understand our position.”

“Go on,” he entreated, taking her hand, and holding it firmly in both of his, as if to give her courage to speak what was in her heart.

“We were afraid of poverty, and still more afraid of debt,” she proceeded. “Between us

and beggary there was only that sum on which you wished us to live, and a little while since I dare not have run such a risk; but now I give up my judgment to yours. If Signor Alfani says I must rest for six months, take care of my throat, and eat meat once a day, I will obey him and you implicitly. From to-night I put myself in your hands. Hitherto I have done what seemed good in my own eyes. It will be an utter relief to me for the future to do what I am told, by some one whom I trust as utterly as I trust you."

"Thank you, Miss Legerton," he said. "Let us shake hands over that bargain. At this minute," he went on, "I could wish to be young, handsome, rich, so as to stand some chance of being allowed to tell you what to do for the remainder of your life. Don't blush so, child," he added. "I mean nothing. 'Twas only an old man's babble. Put on your wraps, and I will walk home with you. Pull that shawl close up round your throat. My dear—my dear, when *will* you learn you have a fortune there,

in silver and gold, which you do not protect from that robber of everything beautiful—the English climate?”

All in a hurry, Honoria obediently muffled herself up to her ears, thrust out a portion of a small foot thickly booted for inspection, and when they reached the hall-door, would have opened her gamp but that Mr. Litchfold told her to put that thing down again.

“Take my arm,” he said; and thus under the shelter of his umbrella the pair walked together back across the dreary, lonely graveyard, down Church Street, and eventually into a dark quiet *cul de sac*, where was Honoria’s home.

When they entered it, he beheld the ruddy firelight, the restful drawing-room, of which the girl had spoken. He saw the evening meal set ready for her return, the calm quiet figure of the mother who was always there waiting the return of Her Darling.

Somehow, as Mr. Litchfold’s eyes wandered over that interior, his heart grew sad and heavy.

“There will come a day,” he said to himself,

as he plodded along Mare Street to the house of a professional friend; "there will come a day, and that ere long," recalling something which had struck him in the expression of Mrs. Legerton's face, "when no mother will sit in that room to welcome her daughter's return. How will it fare with the girl then, I wonder?"

CHAPTER XX.

AT MIRAND'S.

THE morning proved as wet as the night had been. From the windows Honoria looked out upon a good steady down-pour of rain, upon as cheerless a day as could have dawned for the purpose she had in hand. Little as the girl was usually affected by weather, she turned with a nervous shiver from her contemplation of the dripping pavement.

"I wish it had been fine," she murmured. "I do wish it had been fine."

"A note, Miss Honie, from Mr. Litchfold," said Nannie, entering at the moment. "The boy said there was no answer."

Half-hoping Mr. Litchfold had written to defer the day of trial, Honoria opened the envelope—

"Dear Miss L—," so ran the contents of the note — "Be sure you take a cab from the Flower Pot. On no account run any risk of standing about in the rain, and arriving wet and draggled at Mirand's.

"Your friend, JAMES LITCHFOLD."

"He has assumed command over me without any delay," observed Honoria, handing her mother the short epistle.

Mrs. Legerton was in bed. Since that attack of influenza, of which Honoria had made mention, she had not risen for breakfast; indeed it was one of the small pleasures of Honoria's life to pet and coddle the parent who had been petted and coddled so little.

"It strikes me as almost rude in its brusqueness," remarked Mrs. Legerton, her white thin hand holding the note, her still beautiful eyes looking up in her daughter's face; "but then Mr. Litchfold is always brusque. I suppose, however, it is only the absence of manner that strikes me as so unpleasant in him."

"I dare say," Honoria answered, somewhat surprised. Though Mr. Litchfold's utterances were decisive, it had never occurred to her to consider them rude.

With loving and gentle hands she smoothed her mother's pillows, and brought in the well-arranged tray, which always contained some cunningly devised dainty, concerning the introduction of which Mrs Legerton remonstrated vainly; then Honoria, quite regardless of her own meal, seated herself by the bed-side, and after her mother had eaten and drank began,—
"Mamma."

"Yes, dear."

"Do you know I believe you and I represent different epochs of the world's history?"

"My love, *what* do you mean?"

"I mean just this, mammie, that I imagine before you were married all men treated you not as if you were human like themselves, but as if you belonged to some angelic order of creation that the heat could not touch, or the cold reach."

"My *dear* Honie."

"Wait a minute, mother mine," said Honoria composedly. "I have begun to think lately that the gallantry one reads of in old-fashioned books was not the truest kindness. There are not many women who make a man as obedient and docile as Mrs. Lessant did, and the change from lover to husband must, to many a wife, I fancy, have proved *awful*."

"Honie love, I hope you are not—I hope you never have—"

"Ah! no, mamma. I know what you mean, and I could not blame poor papa even in thought, but still *I saw*, and lately I have understood, though he loved you so much, it must have been hard for you, especially as you were brought up. Often when I am walking home in the evenings, I try to think the whole thing out. You are never cross as I am, and yet still little matters jar upon you that do not annoy me in the least. Sometimes I imagine it is with you as it might be with a lady who had never stirred abroad except in her carriage, and then

was suddenly turned out to walk in a crowded street. The jostling and the pushing and the constant whirl would almost drive her crazy. On the other hand, consider how good it is for me to have begun my walking through thronged thoroughfares so young, that before I was twenty-one all thoroughfares seemed alike to me."

"It was God's doing, dear," said Mrs. Leger-ton. "He fitted your shoulders for the burden they should have to bear."

"I want to return to my first proposition for a moment," began Honoria, after a short pause; "or rather, what I suppose I really wish to do, is to put Mr. Litchfold right in your eyes. He is very plain in his language I admit, at times almost blunt, but he is kind and good and sterling at bottom. For instance, why should he, if he were not disinterested, take the trouble he does about my affairs? He cannot hope to make any money out of me, he does not want to marry me, and yet he puts himself to as much or more inconvenience to help us as Mr. Warren did."

"I believe he does," Mrs. Legerton agreed.

"I wonder," went on Honoria, wandering from point to point as was her habit when talking to her mother, "if I *had* married Mr. Warren (of course that is an impossible supposition, but still let us suppose it), how he and you would have got on together. My poor dear, his brusqueness and blundering would have driven you mad. There never was a man, I think, who said so many rude things with such good intentions, who was so utterly wanting in any sort of perception as regarded other people's feelings."

"He was always very thoughtful of mine," said Mrs. Legerton.

"He was always a little afraid of you, I believe; I think now, he stood in some wholesome awe of my stately mother," laughed Honoria. "I occupied a lower step, and he did not consider it necessary to treat my fancies and prejudices with much respect. My love of music for instance; Oh! how he did hate the very name of ART. Well, I would rather be a drudge in her courts—is Art a she, I marvel—than Mr. War-

ren's wife, though he has a comfortable home and a good balance at his banker's."

"And you are right, Honie; you would have been miserable at Antlet Farm."

"And so would you, mamma; now, confess, have you not been a thousand times happier with me alone for your daughter, than with Mr. Warren for your son-in-law?"

"I have been very happy with you, love. Sometimes I could not help feeling a little anxious about the future, but I am beginning to think, Honie, that too much thought for the morrow is almost worse than too little."

"Well, I do not intend to trouble myself even about to-day," said the girl. "I mean to sing as well as I possibly can, and not to fret myself, no matter what the result may prove. I am going to give no lessons, and have told Nannie to get dinner; do you hear that, mamma, no poor scrap of luncheon, but dinner ready by one o'clock. I shall wear my best dress, and try to look as smart as may be. I shall take a cab from the Flower Pot, and arrive at Mi-

rand's as fresh as if I had just been turned out of a band-box. That is the programme, madam, what do you think of it?"

"I am delighted to see you in such good spirits, Honie."

"I did not feel in good spirits half-an-hour ago, but I have 'rallied.' Now I must eat some breakfast. Will you have a book, or 'lie and think'?"

"Lie and think," answered Mrs. Legerton, with a smile. Ah! poor lady, for how many a weary hour she had lain and thought over her daughter's future, till at last she was almost fain to abandon the useless labour, and take refuge in faith, the only sure shelter from coming storms for such natures as hers.

The day grew older, dinner was over, and Honoria, dressed out in all her best, ready to start. She looked a little pale, but hopeful. "Kiss me once again, mamma," she turned back to entreat, "and say from the bottom of your heart you wish me to succeed."

"From the bottom of my heart, Honie. I

have lived long enough to have no prejudices left save those inseparable from my education and modes of thought, and even they are vanishing rapidly, my dear. All I wish, love, all I ever can wish, is for just that to happen which, in the long run, will be best and happiest for you."

By omnibus to the Flower Pot, thence by cab to Mirand's, and the hour of trial was drawing near.

"You are a good girl to do as you were told," said Mr. Litchfold, as he assisted her to alight, "I hope you do not feel nervous."

"Not very, and I shall get over that very shortly."

"Alfani has not come yet, but it is scarcely four. Should you like to go upstairs, or remain here by the fire?"

"I should like to see the room," she answered; so they went upstairs, Mr. Litchfold leading the way, and speaking as he passed to two or three people he knew. Honoria, with her quick sense of perception, taking in the size

of the great warehouse below, the width and ease of the steps they were ascending, the piles and piles of music, the pianos occupying almost every available foot of space, all speaking, as every large shop, warehouse, office, and private residence in London does speak to country people, of money, heaps and heaps of money.

A very fine room, arranged as if for concerts, with a raised semi-circular platform at one end, occupied by three grand pianofortes, representing the three great makers. The floor of the room was covered with matting, and chairs sufficient to accommodate a fair audience were ranged in due order. The ceiling was lofty, and divided into panels painted in white, pale green, and gold. Around the walls were placed, at wide intervals, busts of the principal composers, and at the extreme end of the room was a full-length portrait of Grisi as Lucrezia Borgia.

"Do they give concerts here?" asked Honoria, speaking low, as if she were in a church out of the regular hours of service.

"Private concerts," answered Mr. Litchfold in a tone not much higher. "Mirands make all the arrangements for several foreign artists; and when a new pianist, say, comes over, they send out tickets to managers, to the press, and to private people of influence interested in such matters. Also occasionally, when a well-known performer is visiting in London, he may give a recital here, just in a quiet non-professional sort of way. Oh! here is Alfani."

While Mr. Litchfold left her to meet the foreigner, and exchange a few words with him, Honoria looked at the great authority upon whose dictum the whole of her future success or failure seemed to depend.

She saw a man of more than middle age, and less than middle height, with black hair worn short, closely trimmed moustache, no beard, an olive complexion, dark keen eyes, a mouth that did not smile, an expression which was inscrutable, a man evidently accustomed to lay down the law, and who would have regarded with enormous surprise an appeal from his decisions.

After scarcely more than a minute's talk with Mr. Litchfold, he turned towards Honoria and asked in a strong foreign accent,

"Is this the young lady?"

"Yes," said Mr. Litchfold. "Signor Alfani, Miss Legerton."

The Signor bowed profoundly, in answer to Honoria's salutation; and as, in order to perform his obeisance with due regard to effect, he moved a little aside from Mr. Litchfold, the girl took in the fact that, spite of the inclemency of the weather, he wore a white waistcoat, a light red tie, and a dress-coat. Across his waistcoat wandered many folds of a thin gold chain, in his tie glittered a diamond pin, and on his fingers sparkled rings that flashed even in the dull light of that dreary afternoon.

"Would you be so very good as to remove your bonnet, Miss Legerton?" he said; "and your mantle?" he added. "It is rude everywhere to make inquiry concerning the age of a lady, but you are so young, you will perhaps pardon my putting the question."

"I am nearly twenty-one," answered Honoria, standing there, slight and supple as a willow sapling.

Signor Alfani looked her over critically.

"I should not have thought it," he observed; and then adding, "shall we at once proceed to business?" walked down to the extreme end of the room.

With a rapid gesture, Mr. Litchfold signed to Honoria to follow him. She had no time to think almost, before she was on the platform and standing beside one of the pianos.

"Now," said her friend, in a low tone, as he played a few notes by way of prelude, "do your best."

And Honoria did. She set fear behind, and her young life's design before her, and as the song proceeded, thought less of her auditor than of the success she hoped through him to achieve. She had never felt so little timid. To herself her voice never sounded so well before, as when she sent it out into the silent spaciousness of that still room.

The song was nearly ended. Signor Alfani moved from his wrapt contemplation of Grisi, and turned towards the platform.

"Sing something else," he said, as the last note died away; and Honoria, still hopeful, still confident, obeyed.

"Let me play my own accompaniment, will you?" she whispered; and Mr. Litchfold rising, she took his place at the instrument.

The ballad she selected was one of her own, "The Old Old Story"; and as she sang there came back to her, as if she were living through it again, the memory of that night when she first made a success anywhere, when publicity and honour had been thrust upon her, and the desire for fame, and the craving thirst for applause, were born strong and living in her heart.

Signor Alfani crept a few chairs nearer, then a few nearer still, then came almost close to the platform.

The trial was over; she had done all she could do, she had given out the best which was

in her. Mr. Litchfold felt that as he stood awaiting the great man's verdict.

"Very good," pronounced that individual.
"Very good, indeed."

"Good enough for the public?" asked Honoria's friend eagerly.

"I will tell you about that by-and-by," said the other quietly.

"Tell me now, Signor," entreated Honoria; "tell us both together. Whatever your opinion may be, I would rather hear it than remain in suspense another hour."

"Truly?"

"Quite truly," she answered.

"Well, then, dear Miss, you will never make a success in public. So far as it does go, the voice is beautiful, but it does not go far enough, and no teaching can now make it go further. I grieve," he went on, "to be to you a prophet of so much disappointment, but it is not my mission to tell what is not true, if forced to speak at all.

"Farewell, Miss Legerton; I hope at some

future day to have so great pleasure to meet you again once more. Come, Litchfold, with me. I must have a few words with you about your American prodigy."

But Mr. Litchfold hurried back to the piano, beside which Honoria still stood silent as if stricken dumb.

"My dear," he said hurriedly, "don't mind him; he does not know what he is talking about. These people are full of crotchets and prejudices; you never sang better. We will put our heads together, and see what can be done. Wait for me here for ten minutes, and then we can go home together."

At that point Honoria spoke.

"I can bear it better alone. Thank you, Mr. Litchfold, but I must try to bear it alone."

"Nonsense, child; am I not your friend? Stay here quietly for a quarter of an hour, and I will come back for you. Yes, yes, Alfani, in an instant."

And he hurried out of the room after the

foreigner, and left Honoria alone, in the gathering twilight, with her trouble.

She had endured as much as she could. In the course of less than half-an-hour she had passed through all the stages of doubt, hope, confidence, exultation, fear, despair. In the semi-darkness she was alone with her dead hopes, with withered wishes, sweet, good, womanly, that could never blossom into flower. The fiat had gone forth, the doom was spoken, and stretching her arms out over the piano, she cried like a child, cried till she was sick and tired of crying, and then cried hysterically again, till some one speaking as if from a great distance, startled her into comparative composure.

Over the matting came the sound of hurrying feet up the steps leading to the platform, some one walked quickly, then a hand was laid on her shoulder, and Honie heard this sentence repeated,

"My dear, what has happened? what is the matter?"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HOUR OF SUCCESS.

WITH a great effort Honoria dried her eyes, tried to check her sobs, and finally, with a suspicious huskiness of utterance, answered,

"Nothing."

"But young ladies do not usually cry fit to break their hearts, all about nothing," was the reply. "Come into my room, and tell me the trouble. I fancy I know a little concerning it, and a grief once told, you remember, is a grief half-removed."

"You are very kind, but I would rather go home," Honoria answered, with that instinct of reticence which owes its origin to a breeding that shrinks from proclaiming all wrongs and sorrows in the market-place.

"But I think you had better come and sit quietly in my room for five minutes first," said the stranger behind her. "I am one of the partners in this house, and perhaps I may be able to be of some slight service to you. At all events, I should like to try and show I am grateful for the delight your singing has given me."

"Did you hear me sing?" asked Honie.

"Yes, indeed, I did. And now I want to hear something else. What has gone wrong? Come and tell me all about it."

There was nothing obstinate about Honoria; had there been, this story might just as well, or better, never have been commenced; and there was no distrust—for both of which reasons she followed her new acquaintance to a snug little apartment, where he speedily placed her in an easy-chair, and looked, by the light of a shaded lamp, at her with a puzzled expression.

"You came here to-day to try your voice, did you not?" he said, after he had stirred the fire and coughed a little, and turned down the

lamp, and so made all arrangements possible for her comfort and reassurance.

"Yes," she answered; "and my voice has failed me."

"You sing beautifully, though. I never heard an amateur sing better."

"How do you know I am an amateur?"

"How do I know you are young and from the country?" he said genially. "There are unmistakable signs and tokens. So far you are merely a gentlewoman, and have not yet appended the title of artist to your other recommendations."

"And never can," said Honoria bitterly. "Never, never, for ever."

"Tell me all about it," he urged.

And so entreated she did, his eyes resting upon her the whole time with that same puzzled expression they had worn since she first came into the light.

"Alfani is a good judge, but I should not myself be inclined to accept his opinion as final," said the partner in Mirand's house, when Ho-

noria had ended her parable. "Foreigners understand the damage our climate can do to good voices, but they quite fail to grasp the rallying power of English constitutions. Don't be disheartened. Take care of yourself, and we shall yet hear good things of that lovely voice. By the bye, what do you call the last song you sang this afternoon?"

"'The Old, Old Story,'" was the answer.

"Who wrote it? Where can one get it?"

"I will copy it for you."

"Thank you greatly; but I could not think of giving you so much trouble. Tell me who the publishers are, and I can procure the song at once."

"It has never been published."

"Indeed. Do you happen to know the name of the composer?"

"Yes. I composed it."

"You!" he exclaimed.

"I," she agreed.

"My dear young lady, you will sing it for me again? Grief or no grief, disappointment or

no disappointment, I must hear that ballad once more."

And he led the way back to the piano, lit the gas, beheld her seated at the instrument, and then saying,

"Imagine you have a large audience," took his seat in the front row.

Full, quite full of tears was Honoria's voice as she began her song. But sorrow only lent a fresh pathos to the music, and when she finished, her auditor, more sympathetic or less critical than Signor Alfani, wiped his eyes.

"I cannot do much to lessen your trouble," he said, stepping upon the platform; "but I will buy that song from you if you care to sell it. I will give you five guineas for the copyright, and if it prove a success you shall have some share of the profit. As a rule we do not publish music, but in this case I feel inclined to deviate from our usual practice."

"Five guineas for that song," repeated Honoria.

"It seems a very small sum to you, I dare say," he answered; "but I can assure you—"

"Small!" she interrupted. "It appears a perfect mine of wealth. You must have made a mistake; you meant five shillings. I should only be too thankful to see a song of mine in print, if I got nothing for it."

"I did not mean five shillings, and you shall see that song in print ere we are many months older. We will just settle the pecuniary part of the business now. Excuse my asking you to walk once again into my office. I must trouble you to sign a little agreement which I will draw out, and then I will hand you a cheque. Your first cheque from a publisher, I suppose."

"My first cheque from anybody," answered the girl gaily. "When one gives lessons at two shillings an hour, one is not likely to be paid in such royal style. I—" and then she stopped suddenly, so suddenly that her new friend looked up from his writing and asked, "What were you going to say?"

"I do not know," she answered. "Something else has quite driven it out of my mind. Have I not seen you before?"

"Yes, you have."

"Where?" she asked.

"That is precisely what I have been trying to recollect," he said. "I remembered you the moment you came into this room, but for the life of me I cannot recall the time, or under what circumstances we have met each other. If you tell me your name—which, indeed, I must insert in this cheque—perhaps it may help us to a solution of the mystery."

"I am Honoria Legerton," she replied.

"And I am John Lambe. Now I remember. Do you?"

She saw, as in a dream, green fields, green hedgerows, purling streams, sleeping cattle, flying by, the while an express rushed on. Once again the sweet country scents were wafted to her on the early summer breeze, and she was setting out, hopeful, happy, light-hearted, young, on her first journey into the world.

Involuntarily Mr. Lambe, watching the shifting shadows on her face, stretched out his hand and said kindly,

"I am afraid the world has not been treating you very well since that lovely morning when we travelled together from Ripley Junction."

Then the smile, which was indeed Honoria's greatest beauty, came out from behind the cloud of temporary gloom, and illuminated her face.

"This makes up for all," she answered, touching the cheque; "or, at least," with a little flicker of sadness, "for almost all."

"Money cannot give us back our past, but it can do much for us in the present," he suggested.

"That is just what I feel," she said eagerly and earnestly. "Money cannot give us back those we have lost, but it can purchase a great deal for those we have left."

And so for a little time they talked on, "making friends" afresh, as they had made friends once before, until at last Honoria, saying she could wait no longer for Mr. Litchfold's return, rose and said, "Good-bye."

"Stop a minute," exclaimed Mr. Lambe; "you must give me your address before you go, for

I do not intend to lose sight of you for such a length of time again."

After she had given him her address, Honoria exclaimed, with that shy deferred frankness which had already won friends for her,

"You have made me so happy, Mr. Lambe. How can I ever thank you sufficiently?"

"By giving me an opportunity of making you happy again, my dear young lady," he replied, with ready gallantry; and he accompanied her down the broad staircase and into the lower warehouse, where he asked,

"Should you like one of our young men to call a cab, or stop an omnibus?"

"I will walk," she answered.

"What! Surely not on such an evening, and besides it is quite dark."

"I do not mind that," was the reply. "It is not raining now, and I want to walk as far as the City, at any rate, that I may think it all out quietly."

Quietly! amongst the fret and din and hurry

of hundreds and thousands of people, who were to Honoria Legerton neither kith nor kin.

"Good evening then," said Mr. Lambe, who, in the girl he saw going out into the din and turmoil of the London streets, remembered the far younger girl he had met, who talked so freely and so well concerning country pursuits. "We shall meet ere long, I trust."

With her dress well held up out of the mud, with her mind quite at ease, Honoria walked blithely, jubilantly, along the London streets. Many a man, ay, and woman too, turned to look after the wayfarer who passed them with such an expression of contented happiness shining in her eyes.

Never before—never—had any London street seemed so paved with gold as the Strand did that evening to Honoria. Here at last was the El Dorado her young imagination had conceived, presented in a tangible shape at last. Above, the moon was trying to emerge from a mass of clouds, and the girl looked up at her as though she would have said,

"Yes, I used to talk to you at Antlet, and now you understand what I meant. When I told you one day I should be famous, you either sailed on disdainfully or else blinked at me from behind a bank of mist. It is no good your trying to hide yourself now. That very song I wrote while you were looking straight in through the honeysuckles—ah! those honeysuckles—is the one I have sold to-night for five guineas. Do you hear? For the price of fifty-two and a half lessons. Yes, you may come out and look at me as full and brazen as you like, and taunt me that I cannot sing. I don't want to sing. That is not much. Just for once, perhaps, I might have liked to be clapped and to have an encore; but I have got something better now! something my mother will prize far higher. 'Only a five-guinea cheque?' but, my dear moon, that means gain, name, fame; it means trips down the river; it means visits to Hampton Court, Windsor, and all the other places we planned to see when we could afford the outing; it means eventually opulence to my mam-

mie and self! Ah! my moon, you soften a little when you think of all the years she lived without the solace of even a song, and to-night, though I have failed in one respect, and failed ignominiously, I can bring her such pleasure for once."

And still the girl walked steadily on. Down the Strand, and along Fleet Street into Ludgate Street and up Ludgate Hill, thence right across the south-eastern side of St. Paul's to Watling Street, and so by Old Change into Cheapside. Barely a step did Honoria waste. A person of longer experience in City ways might have saved a few yards she traversed, certainly not more.

Down Cheapside she walked leisurely.

"When I am rich," she thought, peering in at the jewellers' windows, "I will buy mamma that brooch," or "that ring," or "that bracelet," as it might be.

Never a lover thought more of the girl he adored than Honie of a lady whose youth had been past before she was born, and who, to

the outside world, seemed nothing save a gentle and elderly lady.

The girl's life was all before her, and yet it seemed at that moment as if the whole of it were concentrated in the happiness and well-being of the mother whose darling she was.

On she walked, on, and yet still on. Past the finely dressed women with worn faces—she, in her innocence, wondered to meet abroad on foot in such beautiful clothes so late in the evening; past the men who intentionally shoved up against her, and who, disarmed by her look of ingenuous surprise and alarm, took off their hats and begged her pardon, as is the habit of such creatures in the City when they find they have made a mistake which might prove awkward. On with hardly a pause, save for a moment opposite the Mansion House, where an entertainment was to be given, and where already guests were arriving.

To all country people, who have read anything beyond the driest history, there is a curious

mixture of old fancies and new perceptions in the earlier part of their London experience.

The present Lord Mayor, late Alderman, a wealthy and most admirable gentleman no doubt, residing, when not a Lord Mayor, in his modest house surrounded, say, by a few acres of ground at Clapham or Forest Hill, or even, it may be, Forest Gate, merges himself, by some inexplicable mental process, into Sir Thomas Gresham, Sir Richard Whittington, and many another worthy who in turn becomes associated with Queen Elizabeth, James I., and false, careless, pleasant, genial Charles II. Just as hereafter, a hundred years or two after we who read and we who write are dead and gone, the reading and thinking people of that remote future will recall to memory not the Lord Mayor of our time as he at the moment actually is, but the Lord Mayor of *their* imagination as evolved out of newspaper reports—entertaining, in right royal style, Shahs and Sultans, Kings and Kaisers, Emperors and Princes.

Good lack! we are now a profane and godless

people, given overmuch, I fancy, to scoff at those who faithfully and honourably achieve success; but, for my own part, I prefer to adhere to the old tradition, and believe "The Lord Mayor of London" as usefully discharges his trust, as worthily governs his small territory, as the Queen herself.

The above is a later utterance. There was a time when I thought the Lord Mayor stood but a little lower than the House of Lords, and so regarded him as one of the Upper One Thousand, shall we say.

But, well, all this has not much to do with Honoria, who, having sold her song, stood for a minute opposite the Mansion House, watching the carriages as they came up—setting down His Lordship's guests.

To her it was a glimpse of fairy land. It was better than seeing the great ladies going to court, because the night and the flickering moonlight, and the winking gas-lamps, threw a glamour and a mystery over the spectacle that noontide must of necessity always lack.

Quite honestly Honoria believed each carriage contained lords and ladies—the very *crème de la crème* of London society, and she let her imagination run riot, picturing to herself all those fine folks assembled in the Egyptian Hall, of which she had seen more than one drawing.

With a sigh, not of envy, but of pleasure, the girl turned away. Just as she sometimes lingered for a minute to look at the flowers in Covent Garden, and then went about her business, filled and satisfied with the beauty and the perfume,—so now she walked on through the night with a sense of happiness utterly beyond analysis.

Heavily the shadow of the Bank of England, always ponderous, dark, and gloomy, fell across her path; but it brought no shadow over the sunshine in her heart.

“I have sold my song; I have five guineas in my purse,” was the refrain of all her thoughts, and more than one of her fellow-passengers in the Clapton omnibus, which she took at the

Flower Pot (the same Flower Pot whence Mr. Augustus Minns travelled by coach to the Swan, on the invitation of his cousin, Mr. Octavius Budden), wondered what made her face occasionally light up of a sudden, and a smile like that of a pleased child play at intervals about her mouth.

After the omnibus set her down, she had but a few yards to walk before she reached her home; and as was her custom she looked, while crossing the narrow, quiet street in which it was situated, up at the windows on the first floor.

Yes! there was the glow of the firelight seen through the crimson curtains. Mrs. Legerton never drew down the blinds till her daughter was safe within. The "dear, dear, cosy home," thought Honoria, and she pictured to herself the quiet stately figure waiting so patiently for her return; the smile which would greet her entrance; the sorrowful sympathy when she told of her failure; the delight when slowly and tantalizingly she unfolded her good news by degrees, and at last produced the cheque that should assure

her mother she had not fallen asleep in the great music-room at Mirand's, and dreamt it all.

"Where's mamma?" Let Honoria return at what hour or minute she would, that was always the first question she put to Nannie.

As a rule she knew perfectly where her mother would be; but the question had become a habit, and Nannie answered it generally before her young mistress was well inside the door.

On that night, however, she did not answer immediately. She asked instead,

"Have you got wet, Miss Honie?"

"Wet! no, it has not been raining for ever so long. Where's mamma?"

"She has gone to bed, miss; she did not feel very well."

"Not feel well," repeated Honoria. "What is the matter?"

"She came over a little faint about four o'clock, and—oh! Miss Honie, don't go rashly into her room; she may be asleep!" added the woman, as Honoria rushed at the stairs as though she meant to take them and the illness by storm.

Quietly enough, however, she entered her mother's apartment; softly she turned the handle and opened the door. The gas was alight but turned down low, and there on the bed lay Mrs. Legerton, who, though prostrated by mortal sickness, tried to speak a word of welcome to her darling.

"Is that my child?"

Very low and weak was the voice which uttered that sentence—so low and weak that Honoria's heart seemed to stand still as she listened.

"Oh, mamma!" she said, and that was all.

A very agony of remorse was in the girl's heart, as she thought of the length of time she had been away—of the hours she had wasted.

It is curious if you think of it, my reader, that our unconscious and unavoidable sins are always those we mourn over the most bitterly. The last day we might have spent with some one we never contemplated losing, is more present with us through life than the bitter letter we wrote in quite cool blood that lacerated the heart

of some one sufficiently well and strong to feel the sharpness of the dagger we drove with intention home.

"What is it?" asked Honoria after she sat for a moment by the bedside holding her mother's hand in hers. "Where do you feel ill?"

"Not ill, dear; oh, no! only a little weary."

Honoria laid the hand she held softly upon the coverlid, and crept noiselessly out of the room and downstairs.

"Nannie," she said, "I wish you would go for the doctor."

"I did go for him," was the answer, "and he has been here. He will be back about nine."

"Oh! Nannie, Nannie," cried the girl, "what is it?"

"I don't know," said the faithful servant; "I went in to the drawing-room to see if the mistress wanted some more coals, and found her lying back in her chair, looking, to tell you the truth, more like death than life—don't turn so white, Miss Honie. As I could do nothing for her myself, I ran off for the nearest doctor. I was not

away five minutes. He chanced to be at home, and was here almost as soon as I was. He just looked at her, and then bid me fetch some brandy. I ran as quick as I could to get it, and he poured some down her throat. After that, between us, we carried her to her room; and he will be back again at nine, Miss Honie."

There had been for the girl that evening a light such as never lay "on land or sea," and now there came such a darkness as the sun could not dispel or the moon chase away.

Not once had any thought of mortal illness presented itself to her. For always she and her mother were to live together—one mind, one heart, one hope, sufficing for both, and now Honoria dare not contemplate the idea of what she feared; of that which, even with her limited experience of sickness and death, she had seen dimly written on the white, changed face that lay up-turned to view.

"At nine, did you say?" she repeated mechanically.

"At nine. He has sent round some medicine,

and I managed to get her to swallow a dose. She is much better than she was. If you will eat a bit of something, Miss Honie, I can sit beside her. The doctor said she ought not be left. The kettle is boiling, and I put down a muffin to keep hot for you."

"Thank you, Nannie, but I could not eat anything," said the girl; and she went slowly upstairs again, feeling she had commenced the saddest and the weariest journey life could ever have in store.

Silence for a long time, but at last Mrs. Leger-ton opened her eyes, and said feebly,

"Did you—?"

"Sing, do you mean, mamma?" asked Honoria, quick to interpret the meaning of the unfinished sentence.

"Yes."

"Signor Alfani says I have a very good voice, but that it is not strong enough to be very useful—at present," added the girl, with considerate falseness. Already it had begun, that bearing her own burden, the weight of which hitherto

was always shared by another! Already the repression and the silence and the loneliness, premonitory of the longer repression, and greater silence, and more utter loneliness, to come!

"I have done something far better, however," went on Honoria, trying to steady her voice and speak easy and naturally. "Something far, far better than get an engagement. I have sold a song; I have got five guineas for it, and—oh! mamma, if you were only well how happy we should be."

She had broken down at last, she could not help that one cry of distress; but it did not matter. The ears which had once been so quick to notice every change in Honoria's tone, were dulled by the illness that had come on apparently so unexpectedly; and all the poor white lips uttered, very slowly and wearily, was a mere answer to the words, not to the anguish underlying them,

"I shall—be well—do not fear."

CHAPTER XXII.

QUITE ALONE.

"Is there any danger?" It was Honoria who asked this question of the strange doctor Nannie had in her frantic haste fetched as the nearest and most available—Honoria not pliant, or timid, or gentle, but defiant in her tone, almost crazy with anxiety and suspense.

"Danger!" repeated Doctor Elmes, "pooh! what could have put such an idea into your head? Of course attacks of this kind always appear alarming."

"Attacks of what kind?" interrupted Honoria.

"Why, anything relating to the heart," he answered. "Undoubtedly your mother's heart is affected, but with care and rest and a little medical attention she may live for years,—outlive you, perhaps."

"Ah! no," said Honoria softly, and all hardness died out of manner and expression as she realized there might be a something even worse than her mother leaving her, namely, her mother being left all alone.

"I will look in again first thing to-morrow morning," went on the doctor. "Of course some one will remain with her during the night?"

"I will," answered Honoria.

"And see she has nourishment, and takes her medicine regularly."

"Everything you tell me to do shall be done," said Honoria.

"There is one thing I should like to tell you to do that I am afraid you would refuse to comply with."

"I know what you mean, but I could not go to bed; if I did I should not be able to sleep."

"Well then, will you eat? Your servant tells me you have touched no food since one o'clock. You asked me just now if there was any danger, and I answered no; but I must add that your mother's life depends on your keeping in good

health. If you break down, everything, remember, breaks down."

"I shall not break down," was the answer; "strength has been given me hitherto to do all the work I had to perform, strength will be given to me now."

"I admire your faith," he replied, "but you must do your part in works."

"You need not be afraid," Honoria said. "I will eat, and when the necessity for my watching is over, I will sleep."

When the necessity for her watching was over! How many and many a time during the course of the months that followed, Doctor Elmes recalled that sentence. When, he often asked himself, would the vigil end and the rest begin; the vigil that could be terminated but by one event; the rest which could only ensue when death had ended all need for wakefulness.

It was heart disease of much longer standing, of much graver import, than Doctor Elmes had at first imagined.

As the twilight shadows creep into a room

quietly and stealthily, and darken it all of a sudden, the while we are talking most confidently to a friend, so mortal sickness had stolen to the hearth where mother and daughter chatted over their plans and weaved their phantasies together, and in a moment the blackness of night, the precursor of the one ineffable hour, the blackest to the lookers-on at all events which life holds, was around the pair. What did it avail if the disease fluctuated, as it did; what did it signify that the treatment ordered by some fresh doctor seemed to arrest the progress of the malady for a few days?

In their hearts, though they feared to speak the truth each to the other, though in point of fact they never did openly speak it, mother and daughter knew no reprieve man could bring might mean—life.

But yet as we cling to the last few minutes ere a parting even for a short time with those we love becomes inevitable, as we sit on the steamer's deck, till we are almost carried away with the one passenger who is leaving us, as

we stand at the carriage-window while the train waits for the signal to be lowered long after every possible word of farewell has been uttered; so, in like manner, only with that feverish earnestness, and silent persistency, which impending death produces in some natures—would it did in all!—Honorina caught at each poor straw which might delay even for a moment her mother's gentle passage from the river to the sea.

Not very far off lay that sea, unknown, unexplored; so free of danger to the eyes that had never feared to look at the land which to some of us seems very far off; so full of agony to the girl who, when the time came, could only stand on the shore and strain her eyes over that darkling waste of waters, where all she loved had gone down, where for her was no sail of hope, no sun, no moon.

Honorina fought against the progress towards that ocean, the tide of which is ever ebbing on the shores of time, and flowing into eternity; fought as a nature like hers always does fight, madly.

What though she might only gain hours, they alone were worth all the price she paid for them. Nay, if she could gain nothing, she felt in her soul that even to have tried to gain, would prove a comfort to her in the grey, lonely, silence which she knew must ensue when the faint breathing of the invalid ceased for ever, when the feeble light of life should finally cease to flicker.

Was there aught Mrs. Legerton lacked during her illness that money might have procured?

If so, it must have been something which it never entered even the prodigal mind of a west-end doctor to conceive could prove beneficial or acceptable.

And as the end drew nearer, Honoria grew more lavish; just as when shipwreck seems imminent, every other earthly valuable is willingly flung overboard in order to give one more chance for life.

So long as her mother retained sufficient strength to remonstrate against such expenditure, Honoria had to practise pious frauds which never

more than half deceived the patient; but after an illness has lasted for some time, there comes a dimness of perception as well as a lassitude of thought, which causes all things to be regarded as through a mist, dimly and uncertainly.

It came to that ere long, save at fitful intervals, with Mrs. Legerton. She took what her daughter's love procured for her without trouble or question, unless it might be an occasional, "Can we afford this, dear?"

When famous physicians drove down to see this insignificant patient, their visits conveyed to her mind no idea of fees given secretly, and received as if such good things as guineas were the furthest from their thoughts. To Mrs. Legerton, the greatest of them all, who indeed refused to take any fee whatever, seemed no more wonderful an individual than Doctor Elmes from round the corner.

All fame, all riches, all celebrity, together with poverty and anxiety, merged at last into vague shadows seen through that twilight which

comes when the feebleness of the body weakens the powers of the mind.

It was very gradual, mercifully gradual, after that first blow dealt, as it seemed to Honoria, with such cruel swiftness; and the girl could recall, in the days still to come, nights when she sat listening to the faint breathing heard through the stillness—hours when she and disease fought together for mastery,—and the very strength of her affection enabled her to gain a temporary victory.

All this time she did nothing. She never attempted to do anything in the way of earning money. At first she wrote little notes to the parents of her pupils, explaining that she would be unable to give any lessons for a week or two, in consequence of her mother's illness, and these notes were answered in all cases with civility and in many with sympathy; but when a further delay came and then another, her patrons waxed irate and told her some of those worldly truths which seem so hard to people still young enough, and inexperienced enough,

to believe that because they are sick or sorry the whole scheme of creation must come to a standstill.

"I am sure no one can have been more patient than myself, Miss Legerton," said the mother of one of those snub-nosed children, to whom Mr. Litchfold had once so disparagingly referred. She was seated, as she spoke, in Mrs. Legerton's parlour, arrayed in a black satin dress, a red shawl, a black velvet bonnet tied with red ribbons and adorned with red roses. She was extremely fat, wore a huge brooch, wheezed a little as she talked, and altogether did not look very nice, while with a heightened complexion and voice sharp and somewhat shrill, she stated her own perfections:

"I don't want to be inconsiderate to nobody," she said, "and I have kept Florence and Blanche practising, so that they might not lose all they have learnt. It is hard for you, no one can say it ain't. Anybody who has been a daughter herself must feel for you, as the saying is; but as Mr. Osmond remarked to me this

morning, 'Mary, is Miss Legerton agoing to teach those children any more, or ain't she? that is all I want to know.' So you see, my dear, I was forced in a manner, as one may say, to come round; and I am certain, if you just name a day and stick to it, Mr. Osmond won't object. He has a great notion of business, as is only right and fit, he earning his living by it, but he has the feelings of a man for all that."

Honoraria rose and went to the window, feeling as if she were choking. Already she had received about a dozen notes, all couched in language more or less civil, but still peremptory. Never before had pupils been so anxious for lessons; never before had parents seemed to rate her instructions as so valuable.

She had an offer from a school which she would have jumped to accept three months previously, but now she almost resented what she mentally termed the selfish inhumanity of people, who wished a daughter to desert her mother's sick-bed, in order to teach their children

to play more or less indifferently, or to sing mawkish ballads to admiring visitors.

So far her home had been precisely what home is to hundreds of persons possessed of a certain, though limited income, a little domain, into which no stranger had the right to enter, —with the conduct of which not even the nearest friend could claim to interfere; and now in a moment, as it seemed to Honoria, the walls were thrown down, the fences destroyed, and people who had not a thought in common with her, made themselves free to criticize what she chose to do or to leave undone.

They were entitled to do so; therein lay the sting. Of her own free will, or rather perhaps of a necessity stronger than her own will, she had undertaken certain duties, and had been paid for performing them.

And Mrs. Osmond, and people such as she, had not treated her badly, nay, rather, she was obliged to confess in the depths of her rebellious heart, they had treated her well and considerately. What was her mother to them, she thought bitterly, more than

any other girl's mother? If their cook's nearest and dearest lay dying, should that serve as an excuse for an ill-served dinner? if one of the young men behind Mr. Osmond's counter were going to attend his sweetheart's funeral in the afternoon, should that fact excuse his directing a parcel wrongly in the morning? Certainly not. Nay, even, as Honoria well knew, if Mrs. Osmond, or Blanche, or Florence, or the whole three of them were sick unto death, would not Mr. Osmond attend to his customers just the same, as though all belonging to him were blithe and well; ask the rich stock-broker's wife, what he "could have the pleasure of showing her," and inquire of the little drab sent from the nearest dressmaker's, "What is it for you, my dear?"

She had seen enough to know that such things were, and of necessity; but now they came home to herself, which fact with all of us makes a difference. She was perfectly well aware that she had treated people, who had treated her well, with a certain discourtesy; but it only made Honoria more bitter to reflect that at such a time

courtesy should have been expected. The day had come when the fashion of her countenance altered. No more sunny smiles and bright looks for a world which returned sunshine and brightness; rather instead hardness and anguish, because of the sorrow man could do nothing to alleviate.

All this and more passed through Honoria's mind as she stood for a few seconds by the window, trying to recall some form of decently civil speech in which she might reply to Mrs. Osmond's little harangue.

"I am sorry," she began, turning her head towards her visitor, the while the cold winter sun fell upon her white haggard face; "I am very sorry to have caused you and Mr. Osmond so much inconvenience. I ought to have come to some clear understanding with you and with myself long ago. I went on hoping and hoping my mother would get better, in which case I should have resumed teaching ere this. Now, it is only right for me to tell you that while she remains ill I cannot give any lesson."

"But, bless me, Miss Legerton, what do you

intend do to? Your mother may last for years yet."

"God grant it!" said Honoria, in the tone of one who knew her prayer to be perfectly vain.

"And you'll excuse *me*, but if she does, how do you think of going on about money? It ain't my affair, of course; but I have always understood you to say it was a great matter for you to get pupils, and that you wanted to work up a connection."

"You are quite right; I did say so."

"And if you lose your pupils—because you can't expect parents to wait for you for ever—"

"I do not expect them to wait any longer," Honoria answered. "I have no doubt I shall lose my pupils and my connection; but I cannot help that. No consideration could induce me to leave my mother."

"But why don't you hire a nurse if that clean, respectable old servant, that I am sure looks a credit to any house, is not able to attend to her?"

"Nannie is very good, but she is not the same as I am."

"But do think, Miss Legerton, I really am speaking as much in your interests as ours. Suppose this illness goes on for a long time, how ever shall you manage if everything is going out and nothing coming in. I am not a curious person, I am thankful to say, or one given to encourage gossip, but one cannot help hearing, you know, and I am told you get everything any doctor can think of ordering."

"I hope I do; if the doctors ordered anything I could not get, it would make me very miserable."

"But all that must cost a heap of money. I am sure, when our poor little Franky died—"

"I have enough to go on with for the present," said Honoria, cutting relentlessly across a reminiscence she had heard recalled over and over again. "When our store is exhausted I must think what I shall do; in any case, however, I shall not teach while my mother is ill."

"Then all I can say is, Miss Legerton, I think

you have treated us shabby. There, I have said it, and I mean it. We paid you well and regular; we made our hours accommodate you; we never asked you in the cold weather to sit in a room without a fire, though our own children practise with only shawls about them; and if you had taken it, there was always a glass of wine, or a cup of tea, or a basin of soup at your service. When we heard your ma was ill, we let weeks go by, and never uttered a word of complaint, and now, when I do speak, without by your leave, or with your leave, you throw up your engagement, and bid us get what teacher we can."

It is wonderful, the effect hearing our sins rehearsed by an opposing counsel has upon us. Under the torrent of Mrs. Osmond's eloquence, Honoria stood appalled. Hitherto she had felt herself to be so entirely right, that the possibility of any other person entertaining a different opinion never crossed her mind.

Now, however, she began to see that there are two sides to every question humanity can

have placed before it, and she answered accordingly, almost humbly,

"Indeed, Mrs. Osmond, I am very sorry to have seemed to treat you with discourtesy. Had I foreseen, had I imagined, how I should be placed, I would of course at once have asked you to look out for some one else to teach your little girls. I am not ungrateful for your kindness; indeed I am not; and I did not mean to appear rude. I know I ought to have told you long ago I should not be able to give any more lessons."

"Begging your pardon, Miss Legerton, that is just what you ought not to have done. You undertook a duty, and you should have discharged it. If you was going to be a nurse, you ought not to have begun teaching; that is what Mr. Osmond says. He says, 'I wonder what customers would think if I told them they could not be served because I had to cook the dinner'; and he is quite right. We were willing to try to suit your convenience; but we do not like having ours quite lost sight of. As Mr.

Osmond says, that is the worst of having to do with gentlefolks, and people who have just enough money to keep their heads above water. They think they can do just what they like, whereas, Mr. Osmond says, if we had only had the luck to begin with the organist's daughter at the first, we should have been money in pocket, and had somebody glad enough to come whenever we wanted her, now her father is dead, and her mother left with only twenty pound a year, and four children besides Marianne."

"That was an error in judgment which you can now repair," said Honoria icily; then relenting as Mrs. Osmond rose and took up her skirts and prepared to shake the dust of that house off her feet, she added,

"Let us part good friends. Though we do not agree in our opinions, still you will believe I am more vexed than I can express to have offended you; and I fancy when you come to think the matter over, you will not consider it strange that I wish to nurse my mother myself.

If you were ill you would like to have Florry or Blanche near you."

"That is true enough—and I always did take to you, Miss Legerton—but still I think that, as Mr. Osmond says, it ain't always for us to be considering what we want to do, but what we ought to do."

"Well, Mrs. Osmond, I want to stay with my mother, and I believe I ought to stay with her," said Honoria, and so they parted, and so in somewhat similar fashion Miss Legerton lost all her pupils, and was left to attend to her mother without let or hindrance from any one.

Day succeeded day, and week followed week; the former employments of Honoria's life were abandoned, the old interests forgotten as though they had never existed.

During that period the world meant for her two rooms, between which a dying woman alternated. What, to her, were the crowds of people dwelling in London, the hundreds and thousands who each day passed by the end of the

street where she lived, intent on their own hopes, pleasures, sorrows, cares?

Ah! had there been but one amongst them capable of conferring upon her mother health and strength! But there was not, and Honoria knew it.

She had forgotten about her song, about her disappointment, about her success, about her hopes; all these things were laid aside, to be taken up again, it might be, at some future period, but laid aside none the less completely for the time being.

So listless was she concerning external events, so utterly did one thought absorb her, that when the proof at last arrived from Mr. Lambe, she never opened the parcel till her mother asking feebly, "What is that, Honie?" she pulled off the wrapper, and carelessly answering, "Only that song," would have put it on the piano, had not Mrs. Legerton begged that the music might be given to her.

"I shall be back in a minute or two, mamma," said her daughter. "I only want to speak to

Nannie about going for some more of that last medicine."

She looked at Mrs. Legerton as she spoke, looked at the figure propped up with pillows, at the wasted hands holding the printed sheet, at the tired dim eyes vainly trying to read the printed words which once in manuscript had been to her full of a mournful significance.

But the story was ended, the tale told. It had not been much of a story or of a tale, perhaps; yet it contained the record of a human life, and the life was over.

Softly the fingers relaxed—the sheets fluttered to the ground—in a moment Honoria was beside her mother; with one hand she raised the drooping head, with the other she rang out such a peal on the bell as had never previously been heard in the house during their quiet tenancy.

"Run for the doctor; any doctor, instantly," she said to Nannie, who appeared in answer to the summons, and without waiting for bonnet or shawl, without a word of question, the faithful servant ran up the street and into the high-

road, where she accosted a doctor she knew merely by sight, and requested him to come and see her mistress.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I don't know," she moaned, "please, come quick."

He came as quickly as he could. Comparatively he was a young man, and with his buoyant step he followed the servant where she led.

Almost immediately he found himself in the room with two women, one leaning back against a pillow, the other kneeling beside her.

"Is this the patient?" he said, stepping close up to the chair, and taking the drooping hand in his—then—

"Good God! she is dead," he exclaimed. "You have brought me," he added, turning to Nannie, "to see a dead woman."

"What does he say, Nannie?" asked Her Mother's Darling, surveying the scene with fixed vacant eyes.

"Take her away," said the doctor. "See to her." And he departed.

So Mrs. Legerton died; and at the same time the best part of Honoria Legerton died also for many a year to come.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAPTER IV
"I shall be away," said the doctor.
And he departed.
So Mrs. Ingerott died; and at the same time
the best part of Honoria Ingerott died also.
For many a year to come.

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